

MEDIATED POST-SOVIET NOSTALGIA

Ekaterina Kalinina



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2014

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Cover Image: Olcay Yalçın
Cover and content layout: Per Lindblom & Jonathan Robson

Printed by Elanders, Stockholm 2014

Södertörn Doctoral Dissertations 98
ISSN 1652-7399

ISBN 978-91-87843-08-2
ISBN 978-91-87843-09-9 (digital)

Abstract

Post-Soviet nostalgia, generally understood as a sentimental longing for the Soviet past, has penetrated deep into many branches of Russian popular culture in the post-1989 period. The present study investigates how the Soviet past has been mediated in the period between 1991 and 2012 as one element of a prominent structure of feeling in present-day Russian culture.

The Soviet past is represented through different *mediating arenas* – cultural domains and communicative platforms in which meanings are created and circulated. The mediating arenas examined in this study include television, the Internet, fashion, restaurants, museums and theatre. The study of these arenas has identified common ingredients which are elements of a structure of feeling of the period in question. At the same time, the research shows that the representations of the past vary with the nature of the medium and the genre.

The analysis of mediations of the Soviet past in Russian contemporary culture reveals that there has been a change in the representations of the Soviet past during the past twenty years, which roughly correspond to the two decades marked by the presidencies of Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s and of Vladimir Putin in the 2000s (including Dmitrii Medvedev's term, 2008–2012). The critical and reflective component that was present in representations of the Soviet past in the 1990s has slowly faded away, making room first for more commercial and then for political exploitations of the past. Building on Svetlana Boym's conceptual framework of reflective and restorative nostalgia, the present study provides an illustration of how reflective nostalgia is being gradually supplanted by restorative nostalgia.

Academic research has provided many definitions of nostalgia, from strictly medical explanations to more psychological and socio-cultural perspectives. The present study offers examples of how nostalgia functions as a label in ascribing political and cultural identities to oneself and to others, creating confusion about the term and about what and who can rightly be called nostalgic.

Keywords: structure of feeling, nostalgia, memory, past, Russia, Post-Soviet, mediation, television, fashion, internet, theatre, museums, restaurants.

Acknowledgements

It has been a long and challenging four and a half years with many ups and downs. It has not been smooth, but never boring either. Even the long working hours, uneven schedule, and high pressure could never make me regret my choice of an academic career, because besides the pressure and hard work, there will always be a seductive feeling of freedom – the freedom to do what you like and to say what you think. The opportunity for free thinking and free expression was provided by the premises and academic framework of the Baltic and Eastern European Graduate School (BEEGS) and the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies, which financed my work, by the Department of Media and Communication at Södertörn University, which granted me several research fellowships, by the Helge Ax:son Johnson Foundation, which provided me with a grant to spend time at Copenhagen University, by Aarhus University, which made my three months' stay in Aarhus possible, and by the Swedish Institute, which financed my field work in Moscow.

To write an academic work is a complex, painful but exciting task which inevitably leaves one feeling lost every now and then. The journey would have never been possible without the guidance of my supervisors, Johan Fornäs and Staffan Ericsson, in navigating the research battlefields. They made me believe in the light at the end of the dark tunnel. They were not only my academic mentors, but also became my good friends and colleagues, ready to support me in time of hardship.

It is always good to get away for a while to plunge into another academic environment in order to get a fresh perspective on what you are doing. Two such escapes were my stays at Copenhagen and Aarhus universities, Denmark, and one at Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia. I thank Frederik Tygstrup, Martin Glaz Serup and Nanna Bonde Thylstrup for having me at Copenhagen University. I am very grateful to have been able to be part of and to have benefitted from the excellent and inspiring academic environment provided by Aarhus University. Special thanks go to Britta Tim Knudsen, Rosa Magnúsdóttir, Anne Marit Waade, Birgit Eriksson, and Kristina Jerne for reading and commenting on chapters of this book, as well as for making my stay an enjoyable

experience. I express my gratitude to Marina Mikhailovna Pavlikova for hosting me at Moscow State University.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Per Bolin, Helene Carlbäck, Anu-Mai Köll, Ann-Cathrine Jungar, Teresa Kulawik, Ulrika Dahl, Charlotte Bydler, Ninna Mörner and Rebecka Letteval for keeping BEEGS and CBEES alive. Thank you, Lena Arvidson, Nina Cajhamre, Ewa Rogström, Karin Lindebrant and Emel Akköz, for being such a fantastic team, always there to help solve all the issues that give an academic goose bumps. Special thanks go to Dace Lageborg and Michal Bron, who turned nightmarish library experiences into easily accomplished tasks. My sincere gratitude goes to my colleagues at the Media and Communication Department, who have made our institution into an inspiring and open-minded environment where everyone feels that his or her presence and contribution is highly appreciated. I am grateful to our administrative personnel who were always there to solve financial and administrative riddles. Special thanks also go to Lena Casado for being ready to stand up for us in never-ending bureaucratic battles. I am very grateful to Olcay Yalçın for his friendship and technical support, not least in making this cover and posters for the defence.

I am especially indebted to my opponents, Irina Sandormirskaja and Karin Becker, who read my drafts and challenged me to produce a better text and not to be afraid of saying what I think. Special thanks to Hillevi Ganetz for being such an inspiration in the academic world and a true enthusiast.

The job of finding informants was the core of this dissertation and it would never have been possible without Olga Voronova, Ludmila Christeseva, Anton Tajiev and Nikolai Vasilievich Zadorozhnyi. I am thankful to my informants, who generously and open-heartedly shared their knowledge and contacts with me. Without their valuable input and sincere desire to contribute to the process of academic investigation I would not have been able to produce this work. They allowed me to see cultural developments in more bright and sharp colours.

This long academic journey has made me realise that there is nothing more valuable in life than true friends who love you even when they do not like you. I am so happy to have you in my life, Irina Seits, Ekaterina Andreeva, Ekaterina Chernousova, Elizaveta Shagina. Who would have thought that I would actually board this train called doctoral studies! I want to express special gratitude to Anna Ivannikova, who patiently

hosted me during my long field trips in Moscow and passionately engaged with my work. Tatiana Shuleshgko and Julia Dernova were always there for me and never said no to spending a nice relaxing day in the spa, which was a crucial escape from hard work! Thank you, Arba Murati, Eralda Vahidi and Khaldoun Dudin for bringing so much laughter and happiness into my life. You made me into a true cosmopolitan who looks at the world with her eyes wide open and dares to do what she wants.

To go through the difficulties of the last year of work on this thesis would have been impossible without two dear people, Nasser Naje and Ferdinand Choong. You were my shoulders to cry on and my best buddies to hang out with. I thank Ferdinand for being truly pedagogical during the long training sessions and patient when I refused to follow his lead. I have no words to express my gratitude to Nasser for believing in me. I express my gratitude to Kjetil Duvold for fascinating long discussions and wine, reading and commenting on my draft chapters and recommending great books and articles while preparing the best meals in the world.

My sincere gratitude goes to my fellow doctoral students Ekaterina Tarasova, Francesco Zavatti, Marco Nase, Iveta Jurkane, Katarina Weselovski, Natalia Jukunsheva, Marija Saar, Florence Fröhlig, Yuliya Yurchuk, Péter Balogh, Signe Opermann, Anne Kaun, Linus Andersson, Fredrik Stiernstedt, Peter Jakobsson, Carina Guyard, Julia Velkova, Jaakko Turunen and David Birksjö.

I am especially thankful to my colleague and friend Liudmila Voronova, who bravely engaged in all our crazy side projects as my greatest inspiration and support. She became my closest accomplice, and hopefully will remain so in the years to come, because our future projects will be legendary!

I dedicate this work to my family and especially to my mother Olga Kalinina, the most wonderful person in my life, without whom none of this would have been possible. Thank you for being the best mom in the world, making me believe in myself and being my unconditional support.

September 2014, Stockholm

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background

For the past two decades, interest in the past has been a dominant force in popular culture. The film industry has demonstrated a fascination with styles of the past by manically remaking popular films of earlier decades. Television networks have broadcast docudramas, historical documentaries with high ratings, and TV series with historical settings such as *Downton Abbey* and *Mad Men*. Trends and styles of bygone eras have become the latest fashions all over the globe. The aesthetics of the 1950s, 60s and 70s are revived in advertising campaigns, while fashion designers ransack the styles of recent epochs. History is consumed and employed to encourage brand recognition and to attract subsequent economic investments (de Groot 2010).

Obsession with the aesthetics of everything ‘old’ went hand in hand with a rapid, global development of the latest technologies. Thanks to technological advancement it became easier to archive and access data. The availability of digitised, online archives opened up possibilities of information consumption to increasing numbers of people.¹ Where people once had to spend time and money to travel to archives and wait hours for information, today they can retrieve it with one click – whether image, video or text. Digital archives for media professionals, forums for amateurs, Facebook groups and other virtual communities serve professional and leisure interests. These developments have allowed media scholars to talk about the *mediatisation of memory*, in which the media have influenced human practices of remembering (van Dijck 2007).

The increasing availability of the past has been linked to a booming economy in which nostalgia, usually understood as a sentimental longing for the past, was considered responsible for the rapid growth of many creative industries. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, nostalgia for the ‘former East’, fed by multiple consumptive practices, contributed a great

¹ On the advantages of digital archives and libraries, see e.g. ‘European Commission steps up efforts to put Europe’s memory on the Web,’ press release, March 2, 2006, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-06-253_en.htm.

deal to the tourism industries of Germany, the Baltic States and the former Yugoslavian countries.² For example, today one can drive an old Trabant car on a 'Communism Deluxe' tour offered by 'Crazy Guides' in the Polish city of Cracow, or visit the Grūtas 'Communist Park' near Druskininkai, Lithuania.³ Kitschy vintage cars and interiors, colourful souvenirs and ironic portrayals of the Communist past are guaranteed to anyone opting for such 'alternative tourism'.

In the matter of nostalgic theme restaurants and the exploitation of vintage aesthetics, Russia is no exception to this global trend. However, the fact that Russia is the successor of the Soviet Union adds a complex political aspect to its nostalgic tendencies and makes the Russian case unique. I will elaborate on this.

In the mid-2000s, during my last years as a student at St. Petersburg State University, being deeply fascinated by post-Soviet nostalgia and strategic uses of the past, I began to notice an upsurge in commercial uses of the Soviet past in Russia. Old clothes, kitchenware and decaying furniture began to creep onto television screens and into restaurant interiors. Propaganda slogans turned into advertising campaigns while colourful posters gave inspiration to billboards. The escalating interest in the Soviet past – its utopian fantasies, lifestyles, architecture and design, glorious victories and achievements – reached far into many branches of popular culture. The contexts in which the past blended into the present, 'making room for historicist fantasy in everyday life' (Samuel 1994), included everything from culinary tips and interior design to advertising and branding. Indeed, in the early 2000s, a visitor to Moscow could find many restaurants that invited guests to plunge into an atmosphere of Soviet kitsch. The restaurant and night club Petrovich took a trip back into the Soviet 1950s and '60s, offering everything from traditional home-made drinks, such as the tart berry drink *mors*, to *bliny*, the thick Russian pancakes.⁴ In St. Petersburg, the bars and cafés decorated in the Soviet style, with such promising names as Lenin's Mating Call, CCCP, Propaganda and Revolution, sold a Soviet gourmand experience with varying success. Many fashion designers capitalised on the apparently trendy

² See e.g. 'Nostalgia Grows for the Old East Germany', BBC, November 9, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11715906>.

³ For a review of Grūtas Park, see Bridge (2011). On Crazy Guides Tours, see the company's website, <http://www.crazyguides.com/>.

⁴ <http://www.club-petrovich.ru/rus/>.

Soviet culture in the mid-2000s.⁵ For example, in 2003, Denis Simachev, a Russian designer, presented a men's fall and winter collection inspired by the 1980 Olympic Games and Soviet comedy characters. The theme of the collection was 'lyrical remembrances of the strange era of Eighties, the last decade of faded away USSR' (Simachev's website).⁶ The old Soviet comedies and cartoons were regularly broadcast on Russian television. New TV productions and films about the recent past were created. Some of them represented a thoughtful and critical attitude towards the past, while others merely capitalised on a fashionable theme. For example, *Deti Arbat* ('Children of the Arbat', directed by Andrei Andreevich Eshpai, 2004), a 16-part television serial based on the *Children of the Arbat* trilogy by Anatoly Rybakov, was aired on the Channel One network in 2004. Set in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, the serial, following the plot of the novels, told the story of Sasha Pankratov (played by Yevgeni Tsyganov), a student and Komsomol member from the Arbat district of Moscow, and his family and friends. The series portrayed dramatic periods of Soviet history, including growing fear of repression in Moscow, the start of Stalin's Great Purge in the 1930s, and the beginning of World War II. In 2008, the musical film *Stilyagi* (named *Hipsters* for its American release) by Valery Todorovsky presented a picture of the Soviet youth subculture *stilyagi* (literally, 'people obsessed with fashion') of the 1950s. The film became a great success both in Russia and internationally, although it received mixed reviews for its ambiguous portrayal of Soviet history.

Similar excavations of the past penetrated the Russian online space. *Vkontakte*, a social network similar to *Facebook*, used to provide its users with a function to personalise their profile pages by applying a nostalgic layout. When a user switched from the 'traditional' colour and language scheme (the default layout in the Russian *Vkontakte* is very close to Facebook's blue and white colours) to 'nostalgic', the webpage took on a red background with the image of a hammer and sickle in one corner. Even the title of the site changed from the original *Vkontakte* ('in contact') to *Vsojuze* ('in union'). Users could also enjoy a specific jargon: instead of *groups* they form *unions*, instead of *profiles*, they have *dossiers*, and instead of *friends*, *comrades*. Blogs and forums where members of virtual communities share pictures, trade memorabilia and discuss their experiences in

⁵ Such designers included Maxim Chernitsov, Olga Soldatova, Antonina Shapovalova, Katya Bochavar and the duo NinaDonis.

⁶ http://denissimachev.com/content/tm_archive_mens_ss_04.html.

the Soviet Union were among the top-ranked sites in 2008, and are still popular. With tender emotions and love, their habitués discuss the films and cartoons of their youth, East German blockbusters, drinks and food, clothing and toys. For example, the online encyclopaedia '76-82' invited everyone who remembered 'how it all was' (*'kak vse eto bylo'*) to participate in documenting it. Members could e-mail their memories to contribute to an 'encyclopaedia of our childhood'.

At that time, I viewed these manifestations of the commercial use of the past as something amusing and did not pay much attention to them. Meanwhile, the growing interest in the Soviet past was not limited to 'nostalgia as a cultural style' (in Paul Grainge's words), which was a cross-media phenomenon found in interior design, advertisement and fashion (Grainge 2002, xiv). On the contrary, this aesthetic nostalgia was just one facet of a complex and dynamic landscape in which processes of remembering, forgetting and making use of history in contemporary Russia underpinned efforts to create a strong national identity.

The quest for a national idea and a national identity in Russia became more visible to me when I moved to Sweden in 2007 to take part in the Erasmus Mundus master's degree programme Euroculture, which that year centred on the theme of collective memories and European identities. Studying in a large international group, I realised that young people from the former Soviet Union and other socialist states made up the majority of my friends. Our friendship was facilitated in part by the knowledge of a common language, or by similarities between our languages, but also in part by the collective memories and experiences that we shared. All of us who were born in the 1980s shared the same cultural codes, unique cultural features encoded predominantly in mass media: we watched the same cartoons and films, we played with similar toys, and lived in apartments whose interiors strongly resembled each other. We unanimously mocked our childhood experiences and the socialist way of life. We believed at that time that our collective Eastern European experiences and memories created a very distinct identity which placed us closer to each other, while at the same time distancing us from the others, the Western Europeans. At that time I came to the realisation that the commercial appropriations of the past that I had observed were successful because they targeted people's actual emotions and sentiments, and thus paved the way for the formation of strong identities, both for the brands they advertised and for the customers who consumed them.

A few years later, travelling back and forth between Sweden and Russia during my work on this dissertation project, I started to notice growing patriotic sentiments among people. I noticed the emerging nationalistic rhetoric and the predilection for ultraconservative values in which pride in the Soviet past began to play an essential role. Some glorious moments in Soviet history, especially the Great Patriotic War, became the subject of what the Swedish historian Peter Aronsson has called *historiebruk*: the 'use of history', the process by which 'part of the historical culture is activated to form definite meaning and action-oriented entities' (Aronsson 2005). This made me wonder about possible connections between the commercialised uses of the past I had observed in the mid 2000s and the openly political use of the past in the quest for strong national identity and the justification of current political decisions. One encounter became symbolic of the cultural and political transformations happening in Russia during the time I was writing this dissertation. During the first round of interviews I conducted in 2011, a female designer from St. Petersburg refused to talk to me, explaining that she was unwilling to share 'confidential information' about her country with 'traitors' (meaning me) who 'were paid with Western money' to undermine the greatness of Russia. In her patriotic pathos, she went on to claim that there should be 'some great and glorious idea' in every human action, but in her opinion writing a dissertation is not among such celebrated achievements in life. After my initial shock, I soon realised that this was not a freak accident, but the tip of an iceberg of growing militant patriotism and nationalism, which was soon to become something of an established state ideology.⁷ Indeed, mediations of the Soviet past emerged simultaneously with heated debates about the historical portrayal and re-evaluation of the Soviet period and its legacy, the cultivation of official commemorations of the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945, and the role of Josef Stalin in the country's history.⁸ In particular, nostalgia for 'strong rule' seems to be one of the growing trends in Russia during the third term of

⁷ For example, in 2014 the Russian State Duma began debating the renaming of Volgograd back to Stalingrad. For a discussion, see Gazeta.ru, http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2014/06/10_x_6065765.shtml. The Ukrainian crisis of 2013–2014 revealed conflicts in Russian society, and fostered the use of such terms as 'natsional-predateli' (national traitors) and 'piataia kolonna' (fifth column) and the image of an ideal, patriotic Russian citizen. See the discussions in Gazeta.ru, http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2014/06/10_e_6065417.shtml, and on the TV channel Dozhd, http://slon.ru/tvrain/?url=/articles/lobkov_krym_nash_ili_von_iz_professii_vosstanovlenie_sovetskogo_sojuza_nachinaetsja_s_sobesedovani_j_v_rudn-365817/.

⁸ For a discussion see e.g. Baunov (2014).

President Vladimir Putin (Levada Centre 2010). At the same time, the legislative initiatives of 2012–2013 in response to political demonstrations on Sakharov and Bolotnaya squares and the growing nationalistic rhetoric in federal TV networks and the state-controlled press clearly seemed to exploit nostalgia for political purposes and nurture a comeback of authoritarian ideologies.

The use of selected periods of the past is a striking current in much contemporary culture, not least in Russia and other European countries that have emerged from a long period of communist rule. Such phenomena appear to have a strong emotional component, and also share some of their underlying logic, so that similar traits appear across different genres and media forms. The concept of nostalgia may therefore be a key to uncovering what I will describe as an influential structure of feeling – that is, the culture of a particular historic moment, a set of perceptions and values shared by a particular generation – which is most clearly articulated in particular artistic forms and conventions (Williams 1961/2001, 65).

1.2. Aims and Research Questions

Before I proceed to describe the aims and the research questions that will be addressed in this dissertation, I want to briefly explain its title.

Mediation is understood not only as the transmission of some existing message or content, but also as a process of constructing meaning through communication by various media.

The term *post-Soviet* refers not just to the sequential step from the Soviet to the post-Soviet period, but sets the two in a reciprocal relation, inasmuch as the conception of what is Soviet in Russian culture is a construct of the post-Soviet present rather than a passive reflection of the communist past. Hence ‘the mediation of post-Soviet nostalgia’ means not the transmission of an existing nostalgia by media, but the construction of a post-Soviet nostalgia, both as a concept and as a phenomenon, through the process of communication. Post-Soviet nostalgia is also part of a larger phenomenon of mediation of the Soviet past, which in turn characterises the culture of a particular historic moment.

With this in mind, the present dissertation is aimed at investigating how the Soviet past has been mediated in the period between 1991 and

2012 as one element of a prominent structure of feeling in present-day Russian culture.

The Soviet past is represented through different *mediating arenas* – cultural domains and communicative platforms where meanings are created and diffused. Such mediating arenas include literature, television, the Internet, advertising, fashion, restaurants and clubs, and more. Looking at how the Soviet past is represented in several of these mediating arenas allows us to identify common ingredients, which are elements of a structure of feeling of the period in question. Hence, the first research question of this study is: How is the Soviet past represented in different mediating arenas of post-Soviet nostalgia?

Analysing mediations of the Soviet past in Russian contemporary culture, I have found it helpful to divide the period from 1991 to 2012 into two decades, separated by the change from Boris Yeltsin's presidency in the 1990s to Vladimir Putin's in the 2000s (including Dmitry Medvedev's term, 2008–2012). The 1990s were a period of high turbulence, revolutionary changes, wars and unrest, as well as a time of hope, relative freedom and emerging possibilities of change.⁹ The period of the 2000s is characterised by growing stability and improving economic conditions, but also by a shrinking of the public sphere and of media freedom.¹⁰ This new turn in Russian politics made me wonder whether it is possible to trace a related change in mediated representations of the Soviet past in that period. Accordingly, the second research question of this dissertation is: How have the mediated representations of the Soviet past changed during the past twenty years?

What is also intriguing is that various practices of remembering and using history have been labelled as nostalgia – both across a range of media and in the academic discourse. It seems that any attempt to look back at the Soviet period is fated to be called nostalgic. Maria Todorova writes that 'any positive mention of the socialist past is seen as ideologically suspect. We quickly label a video clip of socialist era commodities as communist nostalgia, when we obviously would not apply the term Ottoman nostalgia to a video clip of belly dancers gyrating to oriental tunes' (Todorova 2009). For that reason, I will discuss in this

⁹ For a detailed account of Yeltsin Era see Medvedev (2013) or Shevtsova (1999).

¹⁰ For a detailed account of the first term of Vladimir Putin as the president of Russian Federation see Shevtsova (2005).

dissertation what is labelled as nostalgia and what the term nostalgia means. My third question is therefore: How is nostalgia defined and which types of nostalgia can be identified in connection with different actors and mediating arenas during the period under study?

1.3. Previous Research

The present research combines area studies and particular disciplines. It is situated in the broad intersection of media studies, cultural studies, memory studies, post-communism studies, and Russian studies. More specifically, this dissertation deals with the phenomenon of mediated nostalgia for the Soviet period in Russia, but draws widely on literature in different fields. Although many of the scholarly works that focus on various aspects of mnemonic processes are relevant to this dissertation, in reviewing the previous literature on the topic of the present dissertation I must focus – in order not to drown in references – on those books and articles that are most relevant to my specific topic. Furthermore, since the chapter that follows will present a detailed account of theoretical perspectives on nostalgia, in this chapter I will only map the existing research that focuses specifically on nostalgia for the ‘East’.

In academia, nostalgia has been often understood as a revisionist project of rewriting history in a more user-friendly and entertaining way. At the same time, scholars have emphasised the ‘profound gap between the sanitized nostalgic reproductions and the actual traumatic history’ (Oushakine 2007, 452). This is not surprising, as the main platform for nostalgia production and consumption seems to be the popular culture production of the entertainment industries (Volčič 2007; Cooke 2005). The media scholar Zala Volčič (2007) has argued that, after the collapse of Yugoslavia, it was precisely in the field of culture that the Yugoslav ‘imagined community’ was first challenged, while the media provided a platform within which a new sense of belonging was promoted and maintained. Nostalgia was used as a marketing tool – the best aspects of a lost, idealised past might be seized through consumption – and Yugo-nostalgia was less a longing for a real past than a longing for the desires and fantasies that had once been possible. Media researchers have also pointed out the manipulative power of mass media, claiming that media producers are responsible for inducing a nostalgic mood in audiences (Ivanova 2002, 84-85). Some scholars have suggested that it is appropriate

to speak of nostalgia industries, which include various commercialised practices of remembering (Lagerkvist 2013). Susan L. Holak, Alexei V. Matveev and William J. Havlena (2007) have investigated nostalgia in post-Socialist Russia from a consumer behaviour perspective. Their research has shown that the major nostalgic themes identified in Russians' responses – the break-up of the Soviet Union, nature, and food – were related to advertising and marketing for Russian products. Studies of nostalgia and analyses of popular culture have also revealed that the East was defined as the West's 'exotic other' (Cooke 2005).

Some have seen in nostalgia both a syndrome and a therapeutic mechanism of healing traumatic past experiences (Todorova and Gille 2010), while others understand the emergence of socialist aesthetics as a specifically post-socialist reaction to market changes and to the persistent assault of the capitalist economy, Western values and globalisation (Enns 2007; Godenanu-Kenworthy 2011; Novikova and Dulo 2011). The media scholars Novikova and Dulo have suggested that nostalgia can also be a manifestation of 'glocalisation' and a protest against globalisation and imported Western values. They describe the phenomenon as a 'nostalgia-for-the-past-syndrome' with its inclination for escapism and glamour' which was heavily exploited by politicians and television (Novikova and Dulo 2011).

Scholars have often stressed utopian and illusory aspects of nostalgia, pointing out that nostalgia has little to do with history (Ivanova 2002). At the same time, it has often been believed that nostalgia challenged utopian ideals of 'transition' periods and voiced a critique of the capitalist system of production. Scholars have pointed out that nostalgia in Eastern Europe was seen as a 'regional phenomenon' (Boyer 2010, 17). Eastern Europeans have been understood as looking backwards to find stability and autonomy otherwise denied to them. They 'always fantasized aspects of life before 1989 that seemed better – warmer, more human, safer, more moral – than the chaos and devolution of life today' (Boyer 2010, 18). In this respect, nostalgia has been conceived as a retrospective utopia of safety and stability, a fair and equal society, true friendships, and mutual solidarity (Velikonja 2009; Todorova and Gille 2010).

Nostalgia is often treated negatively in Russian academic discourse because it is believed to encourage consumerist attitudes and to present the past as entertaining (Ivanova 2002; Novikova and Dulo 2011; Abramov and Chistyakova 2012). When traumatic aspects of communist

history, recycled and represented in an entertaining light, are consumed by young audiences who have neither a profound knowledge of history nor personal memories of that past, the process threatens to trivialise tragic aspects of history and to obstruct the process of coming to terms with the communist past, creating instead the conditions for the emergence of militant patriotism among younger generations of Russians (Morenkova 2012). A focus on generational nostalgia as well attitudes towards the past among different social groups have been seen as important (Todorova and Gille 2010). Both those who lived in opposition to the dominant ideology and younger generations have experienced a longing for and an interest in the recent past, learning about it or reinvesting in it and giving it fresh meanings (Yurchak 2006). However, nostalgia does not mean the same thing to everyone. Members of the 'last Soviet generation' remembered their childhood and passed on their experiences to the younger generation (Yurchak 2006). Authors have drawn attention to conflicts between generations and social groups in their recollection of the socialist past. These conflicts surfaced in memory practices which are antithetical to one another, although all of them are often labelled as nostalgic (Buric, 2010).

Ostalgie – nostalgia for the East Germany of the communist period – emerged in reunified Germany during the 1990s, and was often associated with a sense of disillusionment with capitalism and resentment of the transformations that had occurred. Studies of *Ostalgie* have contributed greatly to the studies of nostalgia (Stern 2006; Enns 2007; Godenanu-Kenworthy 2011). Researchers have found that people began to 'cleanse' their 'memory of the oppressive aspects of the GDR and remember gratefully the parochial privacy, slowness and predictability of its 'socialist' life" (Stern 2006, 479). One of the central positions in the research on *Ostalgie* is occupied by studies that highlight the importance of consumer goods as relics of East German day-to-day culture. The anthropologist Daphne Berdahl, investigating the 'social lives' of East German objects after the reunification, concludes that *Ostalgie* both contested and affirmed a new order, while

East German products have taken on new meaning when used the second time around. Now stripped of their original context of an economy of scarcity or an oppressive regime, these products largely recall an East Germany that never existed. They thus illustrate not only the way in which memory is an interactive, malleable, and highly

contested phenomenon, but also the processes through which things become informed with a remembering – and forgetting – capacity. (Berdahl 2010, 52)

The question of the role of such objects – *Ostprodukte* – has been raised in the research of Jonathan Bach, who distinguished between two forms of nostalgia: a ‘modernist’ nostalgia in the former territory of East Germany and a ‘nostalgia of style’ found primarily (but not exclusively) in the former West Germany (Bach 2002). In the case of modernist nostalgia, the consumption of *Ostprodukte* appears as a form of production itself: a reappropriation of symbols that establishes an ‘ownership’ of symbolic capital. In the nostalgia of style, *Ostprodukte* constituted ‘floating signifiers of the ‘neokitsch’ that undermine consumption as an oppositional practice by at once turning the consumer into the market and the goods into markers of personal ironic expression’ (Bach 2002, 548). Dominik Bartmanský’s study argued that material objects of the past are nostalgic icons, which are successful because they act as mnemonic bridges *to* rather than tokens of longing *for* the failed communist past (Bartmanský 2011).

A valuable contribution was made to the studies of politics of nostalgia. Scholars Olga Shevchenko and Maya Nadkarni in their study of Russian and Romanian nostalgic practices have come to the conclusion that ‘the kernel of political significance of nostalgic practices is determined by the larger socio-historical logic of national post-socialist development, so that identical practices, or even identical intentions animating these practices, fulfil radically different social functions depending on the context in which they unfold’ (2004, 507). They have argued that while nostalgia should not be assumed to be political, ‘politics are nonetheless at work, both in what these practices accomplish and in who does the labelling and naming of practices as nostalgic’ (Shevchenko and Nadkarni 2004, 518). They also have pointed out the absence of a thorough ethnographical study that could shed some light on how nostalgia is read into politics and politics into nostalgia. Taking from here the present dissertation aims to fulfil a gap in the existing research by providing a detailed study of the historical development of what is called post-Soviet nostalgia in Russia from 1991 to 2012, by analysing several cases studies and linking them with the larger theoretical discussions on nostalgia and looking at different uses of nostalgia not least political.

1.4. Structure of This Dissertation

In this introduction I have briefly presented the background, the previous research the aim and the research questions of this study, as well as structure of this dissertation.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

Chapter 3 outlines my sources and the methodological framework.

Chapter 4 begins with a visit to the Moscow restaurant Petrovich and finishes with a stroll through the USSR museums.

Chapter 5 examines how the Soviet Union was remembered and re-constructed in the theatre plays *Pesni Nashego Dvora* and *Pesni Nashei Kommunal'ki*, and in the TV shows *Namedni: Nasha Era*, *Staraia Kvartira* and *Starie Pesni o Glavnom*. I also analyse the TV series *Nasha Gordost*, *Legendi SSSR*, and the TV channel *Nostalgiia*.

Chapter 6 investigates the process of mediation of post-Soviet nostalgia in fashion brands Denis Simachev and Antonina Shapovalova.

Chapter 7 investigates the online community *Entsiklopedia Nashego Detstva*.

Conclusion summarises the results of my study, answers the research questions and offers some final reflections.

2. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter I will present the theoretical framework used in the present dissertation to analyse the empirical material. Raymond Williams's concept of structure of feeling provides a theoretical framework for studying the change in uses of the past and the nostalgic tendencies in Russian culture after the fall of the Soviet Union. I will begin by explaining the term 'structure of feeling' and then go on to provide perspectives on the concept of nostalgia, since my studies have led me to the firm belief that nostalgia is a central part of the dominant structure of feeling in present-day Russia.

2.1. Structure of Feeling

Zeitgeist, or the *spirit of the times*, is a term sometimes used to describe the key events and ideas that are believed to define epochs and create premises for change (Blumer 1969; Nystrom 1928; Vinken 2005; Sekacheva 2006). I prefer the term *structure of feeling*, developed by the cultural theorist Raymond Williams to characterise lived experience at a particular time and place.¹ It has the advantage that 'feeling' better emphasises the emotional and affective aspects that seem so evidently relevant to nostalgia, while the word 'structure' stresses that we are talking about a socially organised construction rather than some kind of magical 'spirit'. The concept of structure of feeling denotes the culture of a particular historical moment: a common set of perceptions and values shared by a particular generation, which is most clearly articulated in particular artistic forms and conventions:

In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organisation. And it is in this respect that the arts of a period, taking these to include

¹ The term 'structure of feeling' was first used in *Preface to Film* (1954, with Michael Orrom), further developed in *The Long Revolution* (1961), and extended and elaborated throughout Williams's life, in particular in *Marxism and Literature* (1977).

characteristic approaches and tones in argument, are of major importance. (Williams 1961/2001, 65)

Williams was convinced that one must study artistic expressions in order to acquire a deeper understanding of a period's way of life or structure of feeling. Being particularly sensitive to the changes occurring in society, artists are usually the first to spot transformations and new trends.

Art, while clearly related to the other activities, can be seen as expressing certain elements in the organisation which, within that organisation's terms, could only have been expressed in this way. It is then not a question of relating the art to the society, but of studying all the activities and their interrelations, without any concession of priority to any of them we may choose to abstract. (Williams 1961/2001, 62)

Williams stressed that even if 'a particular activity came radically to change the whole organisation, we can still not say that it is to this activity that all the others must be related; we can only study the varying ways in which, within the changing organisation, the particular activities and their interrelations were affected' (Williams 1961/2001, 62). One should not study only art, or only television, for example. Even if we admit that television plays a central role in the formation of values in contemporary Russia, we cannot claim that a change in attitudes and values occurred only because of the medium of television. Because activities can be conflicting and controversial, changes in society will be complex, and controversial, ambiguous and even paradoxical elements will continue to be present throughout its organisation (Williams 1961/2001, 62). That is why, rather than focusing on one particular case, the present study examines relations between different mediating arenas. In other words, this dissertation represents 'the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life', an attempt 'to discover the nature of the organisation which is the complex of these relationships' (Williams 1961/2001, 63).

Williams argued that any adequate definition of culture should include three categories and the relations between them: 'the "ideal", in which culture is a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute values' (in this case, the analysis of culture is the description and discovery of these values in human lives and works); 'the "documentary", in which culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously

recorded' (the analysis of culture then is 'the activity of criticism, by which the nature of the thought and experience, the details of the language, form and convention in which these are active, are described and valued'); and the 'social', in which 'culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour' (the analysis of culture in this case is 'the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture', including both historical criticism and the analysis of 'elements in the way of life') (Williams 1961/2001, 57–58).

Williams proposed to begin the search for the structure of feeling of past eras in *documentary culture*, which in the case of nostalgia in Russia includes theatre, literature, architecture and interior design, television, fashion and the relations between these fields. These 'documents' are not to be studied in isolation: their significance must be analysed in relation to the whole organisation, 'which is more than the sum of its separable parts' (Williams 1961/2001, 65). Williams pointed out that documentary culture is essential to studying a way of life when 'living witnesses are silent' (Williams 1961/2001, 65). But even living people can fail to understand the structure of feeling of their own time. Taking this into consideration, the cultural analysis presented in this dissertation, according to Williams, can only be an approximation.

The notion of *selective tradition* is very important to this study as a factor that connects the lived culture of a 'particular time and place, only fully accessible to those living in that time and place' with the period culture, i.e. the recorded culture (Williams 1961/2001, 66). If the process of preserving a cultural heritage is one of selective tradition, then the selection process, based on criteria of value and importance, starts in the historic period itself and reflects the organisation of that period. After all the witnesses are gone, the lived culture will be reduced to the selected elements and represents (a) a contribution to the general development of the society; (b) the historical record and reconstruction of a society; and (c) a rejection or forgetting of some aspects of what was once a lived culture (Williams 1961/2001, 68). The selection process, according to Williams, is 'governed by many kinds of special interest', including those linked to social groups or classes.

Just as the actual social situation will largely govern contemporary selection, so the development of the society, the process of historical

change, will largely determine the selective tradition. The traditional culture of a society will always tend to correspond to its *contemporary* system of interests and values, for it is not an absolute body of work but a continual selection and interpretation. (Williams 1961/2001, 68, emphasis in original)

Because the process of change is constant, complex and continuous, it is impossible to predict which past works will be relevant in the future. In this process of selective tradition it is therefore important that cultural institutions (museums and educational institutions) preserve ‘the tradition as a whole’, not the result of some selection performed in accordance with contemporary interests. However, this ideal scenario does not always happen. In fact, traditions often turn out to be of recent origin and sometimes are invented outright, which can be particularly relevant in the modern development of the nation and of nationalism for example (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Cultural traditions in modern societies are ‘a continual selection and re-selection [and interpretation] of ancestors’ (Williams 1961/2001, 69). Because a society sees its past through the lens of its contemporary experience, it makes sense, Williams suggested, not to return to the work of the period, but ‘to make the interpretation conscious, by showing historical alternatives; to relate the interpretation to the particular contemporary values on which it rests; and, by exploiting the real patterns of the work, [to] confront us with the real nature of the choices we are making’ (Williams 1961/2001, 70).

Williams connects the notion of selective tradition with the concept of generations by indicating that each generation has its own selective tradition which is different from all others. This places the structure of feeling in direct connection with a change of generations. Williams pointed to the early uses of the concept of generations in connection with the description of historical time and periods as ‘the specific and influential sense of a distinctive kind of people or attitudes’ (Williams 1976/1983, 140). The concept of ‘commonly experienced time’ for Williams is crucial to the concept of a cultural generation, which brings it closer to Mannheim’s concept of a generation, defined as a group of individuals of similar ages whose members have experienced significant historical events during a certain period (Mannheim 1927/1952). Central to such a notion of generation (see e.g. Aroldi and Colombo 2007; Prensky 2001; Rosen 2010; Vittadini et al. 2014) is the shared experience of the same ‘formative events’ (such as wars, revolutions or social movements)

or shared new experiences (such as the use of media technologies among 'Generation Y', the 'millennials', 'Generation Z' or the 'digital natives' [those born during the 1980s and 1990s, and raised on 24-hour cable TV, home computers, and the Internet], or among the iGeneration [those born in 2000 or later who are growing up with devices such as iPhones, iPads etc.]). Different experiences and formative events should be seen among the major reasons why a structure of feeling cannot be learned. 'One generation may train its successor, with reasonable success, in the social character or general cultural pattern, but the new generation will have its own structure of feeling, which will not appear to have come "from" anywhere' (Williams 1961/2001, 65). This implies, according to Williams, that 'the changing organisation is enacted in the organism': every new generation responds in its own way to the changes and reproduces the changes in organisation with the creative tools available at the given moment (Williams 1961/2002, 65). This explains why some of the examples I have chosen for analysis are different for the 1990s and the 2000s. For example, while other channels of individual expression were not accessible, dress (and rock music and other artistic practices which were largely prohibited) was a platform of resistance and expression for youth in the 1980s. It was a specific medium for the expression of the tendencies of a certain change in social life in that period. In the structure of feeling that was materialised in restaurant culture and in television in the mid-1990s, other creative tools became more prominent. Similarly, the post-2000 generation of Internet users and active consumers of luxury goods came to use online communities and designer fashion brands as their main nodal points or mediating arenas. Each period and generation had specific dominant media forms of documentary culture.

In this dissertation I will therefore analyse selected examples of mediations of the Soviet past by actively relating them to the times in which they were created and interpreted in order to show the changes that have taken place in values, attitudes and ways of life in contemporary Russia, and to discern what role nostalgia plays in regard to the overall structure of feeling of the period in question.

2.2. Memory, Identity and Mediation

In this section I will elaborate on how and why the past, memory and history can be used strategically, beginning with a general overview of the

terms followed by a discussion on the use of the past, memory and history for the construction of identities, and concluding with a definition of how the past and memory can be mediated.

2.2.1. Memory

Scholars have drawn distinctions between different kinds of memory. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur differentiated between a person's *individual memory* of his or her life and the *shared memories* or *collective memory* that members of a group have in common. This collective memory provides access to the past through reconstructions, narrations and testimonies of events, and presupposes that the individuals have some kind of trust in each other's words. Individual memories constitute the collective memory and are in turn shaped against the background of that collective memory (Ricoeur 2000/2006). Maurice Halbwachs (1925/1992) argues that because *individual memories* depend on *group memory*, the process of remembering should not be understood as a purely individual practice. According to him, if individuals can remember certain events in a coherent manner, it is because a society provides both the material for remembering and a context filled with commemorative activities. Social groups also highlight which events an individual should remember or forget, and produce *shared memories*, which the individual has never experienced in any direct way.² Based on their relation to past and present, Halbwachs makes distinctions between the concepts of collective memory, autobiographical memory, historical memory and history. *Autobiographical memory* is, for Halbwachs, a memory of events of which one has a personal experience, yet it can still be formed by a society. *Collective memory* is the active past that forms people's identities in the present.

Halbwachs was criticised for dismissing individual memory in relation to collective memory when he claimed that personal memory constitutes a 'viewpoint on the collective memory', a viewpoint that changes according to the individual's relationships with a group (Halbwachs 1980, 48). In defence of Halbwachs, Paul Ricoeur pointed out that Halbwachs's

² Maurice Halbwachs's theory of collective memory first emerged in his work *Social Frameworks of Memory* (originally published as *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, 1925), and was then further developed in *The Legendary Topography of the Holy Land* (1941) and *The Collective Memory* (1950), which was published after his death.

belief that the collective memory is inflected by the individual's relationship with different groups in fact opens up the very possibility of individual agency. Ricoeur stressed that Halbwachs's position presupposes that the individual consciousness has 'the power to place itself within the viewpoint of the group and, in addition, to move from one group to another' (Ricoeur 2000/2006, 123). Jay Winter has argued that sites of memory are 'created not just by nations, but primarily by small groups of men and women who do the work of remembrance' (Winter 2006, 136). Hence it is necessary to examine individual memories and their interrelations with group memories in order to study exactly how those group memories are constructed.

Collective memory can stretch far back, but it is mostly concerned with events that are within living memory, which means that the group memory is shorter than the average human life. Often, social groups have participated in the events they recollect and are capable of grasping them directly. Halbwachs believes that, as soon as living communication turns into texts, images, rituals, monuments, or any other form of 'objectivised culture', memory is transformed into history. Essentially, history arises when the past 'is no longer included within the sphere of thought of the existing groups' (Halbwachs 1980, 106). So *history* is the remembered past to which one no longer has a direct relation, while *historical memory* can be understood as memory that reaches individuals through historical documents.

What Halbwachs conceives as collective memory Jan Assmann defines as a *communicative memory*, a memory based on everyday communicative practices. What Halbwachs defines as history Assmann calls *cultural memory*. Assmann argues that 'in the context of objectivised culture and of organised or ceremonial communication, a close connection to groups and their identity exists which is similar to that found in case of everyday memory' (J. Assmann 1995, 128). In other words, a group builds its understanding of unity and uniqueness upon this preserved knowledge and is able to reproduce its identity. Thus, he continues, 'objectivised culture has the structure of memory' (J. Assmann 1995, 128). The distance from the everyday, as well as the availability of fixed points (texts, monuments, sites, rituals) can characterise cultural memory in contrast to communicative memory. Crystallised in certain cultural forms, these collective experiences can become accessible and be used after many years. Hence, building on Halbwachs's theory, Jan Assmann

defines *cultural memory* as a 'collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation' (J. Assmann 1995, 126).

As Anne Whitehead points out, Halbwachs makes a critical distinction between the image of the past produced by memory and that produced by history.³ Group memory is focused on retaining a constant identity over time and therefore produces a sense of the past without radical changes and without ruptures and upheavals (Whitehead 2009, 131). History on the contrary, by focusing on the whole, tends to emphasise the alterity of the past and is persuaded that societies are in constant transformation.

For Paul Ricoeur, historical research is an activity and a critical authority whose aim is to support, correct or contradict collective memory, and the relations between history and memory can be analysed in three steps (Ricoeur 2000/2006, 296). First, memory establishes the meaning of the past. Second, history introduces a critical dimension into our treatment of the past. Third, the insight by which history from this point onward enriches memory is imposed on the anticipated future through the dialectic between memory's *space of experience* and the *horizon of expectation* (Ricoeur 2000/2006, 296-297). Ricoeur borrows these two terms from *Futures Pasts* by Reinhart Koselleck (1985/2004), who argues that there are multiple historical times which depend on social and political institutions, organisations and practices. According to Koselleck, different social and political groups have different historical times, although they are measured similarly to natural time (Koselleck 1985/2004, 2). He argues that, with the advent of the modern age and its new social and political expectations, people developed a new notion of history. Whereas during the Middle Ages people had lived in anticipation of the end of the world, after the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, humanity began to believe in the idea of progress (Koselleck 1985/2004, 11). The future became associated with the idea of progress, and was thus differentiated from the past. In this differentiation of past and future, or 'experience and expectation', Koselleck sees an approach to grasping

³ The definition of the word 'past' given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* reflects the duality of this notion, referring both to the objective past and to interpretations of events that have happened. As the past is no longer accessible, historians need traces or evidence of the past in order to carry out the act of interpretation. Such traces may be material artefacts or oral histories, that is, memories in material or non-material form.

historical time (Koselleck 1985/2004, 3). He suggests exploring the fundamental polarity between the 'space of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation'. The space of experience refers to the totality of what is inherited from the past, its sedimentary residue constituting the soil in which desires, fears, predictions, and projects take root – in short, every kind of anticipation that projects us forward into the future. But a space of experience exists only in diametrical opposition to a horizon of expectation, which is in no way reducible to the space of experience. Rather, the dialectic between these two poles ensures the dynamic nature of historical consciousness (Koselleck 1985/2004). Koselleck insists that historians, when analysing certain phenomena, should also study the people living at the time in question with reference to the categories of experience and expectation. The problem is, however, that this effort cannot rely completely either on memory or on history. Memory fails to fully reconstruct the events, while historical accounts only partially represent the past and are subject to change and misinterpretation. Ricoeur opposes the idea that historical knowledge can ever be absolute and certain, but still thinks that it is bound to certain 'objective' traces of the past.

According to him, historical research is comprised of three steps (Ricoeur 2000/2006, 136-137). The first step is work with *archives and documents*, which serve as traces of the past. In the process of searching among such archives and documents, something may always be overlooked or lost (Ricoeur 2000/2006, 146-181). As a result, the whole process of historical investigation is an interpretative activity which is dependent on people's interests and knowledge. Historians, guided by their own questions, detect 'facts, capable of being asserted in singular, discrete propositions, most often having to do with the mentioning of dates, places, proper names, verbs that name an action or state' (Ricoeur 2000/2006, 178). Ricoeur stresses that these facts do not necessarily correspond directly to what actually happened or to the living memory of witnesses. He concludes that even facts are the result of the interpretative actions of the archivists and historians. The second step is the *explanation* of the facts and their relations to each other by a historian (Ricoeur 2000/2006, 182-233). Ricoeur insists on taking into consideration all the possible reasons and factors that may explain facts and relating them to each other. The last step is the production of *textual representations* of the past, which is always rhetorical and interpretative (Ricoeur 2000/2006,

234-280). The whole operation is a circle of interpretation, as the historian's work itself becomes a part of the material preserved by institutions such as libraries and archives, and subject to further revision. However, even if historical research is interpretative, Ricoeur finds that one can nonetheless speak of a truthfulness or objectivity of historical account. Even a false testimony or document refers to something that actually happened. If a historian treated the testimonies of the past critically and with reflection, then she or he will have produced a representation that is faithful to the available evidence and can therefore be called objective, even if it is subject to amendment. The only option is to trust historians to be critical and reflective in interpreting sources.

But it is necessary to understand that the past, memory and history are constructions and are often used for various strategic purposes and present-day needs (Aronsson 2004). Interest in the past and cultural heritage, conceived as a synergy of tangible and intangible artefacts and discourses, has existed for a long time. The modern era with its accelerating technical progress has transformed people's lives in distinct ways, while rapid communication has compressed both the spatial and temporal dimensions. Under these conditions, the obsession with memory 'functions as a reaction formation against' our changing life-world (Huyssen 1994, 7). Post-modernism, with its criticism of grand narratives and return to the use of old styles, has encouraged the revitalisation of memory, nostalgia, revisions of history and new conceptions of past, present and future (Sim 2001/2002; Connor 2004). Nations often used history to establish continuity between past and present and to consolidate identities, especially during dramatic transformations of a society. Societies undergoing periods of transformation strive to strengthen the bonds between individuals by sharing a strong group identity in order to stay intact (Anderson 1991; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992; Smith 1991).

2.2.2. Identity

According to Ernest Gellner (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm (1992), *identity* pertains to some integral entity and can be described as a range of characteristics unique to a particular culture and 'innate' in a specific people. At the same time, identity accentuates the feeling of belonging that is shared among people in a social group based on shared experiences. Identities can also be 'understood as meanings attached to human

individuals or collectives, in interaction among themselves and with surrounding others', and formed by 'signification processes' (Fornäs 2012, 43). Identities should be conceived not as static, but as dynamic: no form of identity is ever complete or totally stable since identities always tend to change with time. They are 'never unified', but 'increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicisation, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation' (Hall and du Gay 1996, 4). There are different types of identities. Identities vary and can be individual, social, cultural, ethnic, gender, sexual, national, and so forth.

A *nation* in turn is 'an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign' (Anderson 1991, 5). Such a community is imagined because its 'members will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson 1991, 6). While a small community whose members know each other is easier to sustain, the process of forming a unified identity is more complicated in large communities whose members do not know each other and never meet face to face. Identity formation in such a community requires various means of communication, including mass media. Nations are created in a complex process of nation building which is carried out through the political use of the past and by means of representational systems such as mass media. Representations and their mediations are at the centre of identity formation.

Representation is believed to be one of the central practices of culture and the 'circuit of culture' (Hall 1997, 1). As culture is all about 'shared meanings' which must be distributed and understood by the participants in cultural exchange, culture uses representational systems which are composed of signs and symbols (Hall 1997). Stuart Hall has developed a constructivist approach which recognises social character as system of representations. As Hall puts it, 'things do not mean: we construct meaning, using representational systems – concepts and signs' (Hall 1997, 25). In this conceptual framework, the mass media are such a system of communication for constructing identities through interconnected networks of verbal language and other audiovisual symbols. In this perspective, nostalgia can be understood as constituted by representations of a certain kind. Nostalgia is a representation of the past, mediated in signs

and symbols through various communication channels. If memory and history are central to identity construction, can nostalgia in these modern times be used as a tool for constructing a shared sense of belonging?

The moment we try to repair longing with belonging, the apprehension of loss with a rediscovery of identity, we often part ways and put an end to mutual understanding. *Algia* – longing – is what we share, yet *nostos* – the return home – is what divides us. It is the promise to rebuild the ideal home that lies at the core of many powerful ideologies of today, tempting us to relinquish critical thinking for emotional bonding. The danger of nostalgia is that it tends to confuse the actual home and the imaginary one. In extreme cases it can create a phantom homeland, for the sake of which one is ready to die or kill. Unreflected nostalgia breeds monsters. Yet the sentiment itself, the mourning of displacement and temporal irreversibility, is at the core of the modern condition. (Boym 2001, xv–xvi)

I agree with Boym that it could be not only problematic, but also very dangerous to build a sense common identity on the basis of nostalgia. Nevertheless, nostalgic sentiments are often used for identity construction in certain cultural and political contexts. Could it be because nostalgia has in its armature elements that can be employed in the process of identity formation – appeals to an imaginary home, selectivity in relation to history, an emotional rather than rational approach, play on symbols, et cetera? I will leave this question open for now, and return to it during the analysis of the collected empirical data, rather than let it distract us from the examination of the process of identification.

Identification is also a process of *articulation* in which differentiation plays a major role (Hall 1986/1996, 141–142). ‘An articulation is thus the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time’ (Hall 1986/1996, 141). ‘And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of “frontier effects”. It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process’ (Hall and du Gay 1996, 3). Articulation is useful in relation to how communities address past events and past symbols in order to create current identities. Certain memories and past events are articulated and juxtaposed in various media, and as a result become essential parts of identity formation. Like Williams, Ernest

Gellner argues, for example, that nations might use cultural wealth from history to transform such traces of the past radically, emphasising some and omitting others (Gellner 1983, 55). One must also focus on the circumstances and context ‘that make [it] possible for a discourse to articulate distinct elements that have no necessary, logical, natural or universal relation’ (Fornäs 2012, 54). Fornäs goes on to quote Hall (1986/1996, 142): ‘Thus, a theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects.’ As Fornäs points out, Hall’s definition

shows that while what the combination symbols make of elements (sign and meaning, or representation and reference) is always context-dependent, it need not be completely arbitrary in a strong sense, but conditioned by the historical and social circumstances where symbols circulate and are used. The concept of articulation invites studying how symbols are combined with plural meanings in socially situated signifying practices, and in particular to understand how those meanings that are attached to subjects as their identities also are context-dependent. (Fornäs 2012, 54)

The process of identification appears to ‘invoke an origin in a historical past with which [identities] continue to correspond’, but in reality it uses ‘the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being’ (Hall and du Gay 1996, 4). Identities are narrated and ‘constituted within’ representations, and ‘relate to the invention of tradition as much as to tradition itself: identities call us, not to return to our roots, but to come to terms with them (Hall and du Gay 1996, 4). Identities arise from ‘the imaginary (as well as the symbolic) and therefore, always, partly constructed in fantasy, or at least within a fantasmatic field’ (Hall and du Gay 1996, 4).

Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally constituted unity – an

‘identity’ in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation). (Hall and du Gay 1996, 4)

Identities ‘arise and develop by the mediation of material tokens or signs of some kind: words, images, sounds or other perceptible external marks organised into various forms of artefacts, texts, works, genres and discourses’ (Fornäs 2012, 43). Identities articulate various signs and symbols, basic material or immaterial units ‘for making meaning by attaching meaning to [them] in socially contextualised interactive, intersubjective and interpretive practices’ (Fornäs 2012, 44). Nations too are imagined through objects and narratives (Sturken 1997, 5). Both the memory and the history of nations are narrated through popular culture, commodities, the media, public images and memorials. Cultural memory is produced in turn through representations, images, objects and the human body – the ‘technologies of memory’ through which ‘memories are shared, produced, and given meaning’ (Sturken 1997, 9). Thus commodities and consumer culture play an important role in the production of cultural memory and national identity. Marita Sturken argues that, in the contemporary world, the boundaries between art and commerce are blurred. She ascribes to commodities a capacity for producing cultural meanings.

2.2.3. Mediation

At this point I find it important to connect the foregoing discussion of structure of feeling and the uses of the past in constructing identities with the concept of *mediation*. I touched on this term in the introduction in referring to mediating arenas, and again in regard to the articulation of identities and the past through various media. Mediation is an essential concept, since I will be examining the capacities of media in the portrayal of the past and how different mediating arenas contribute to the changing representations of the past and hence to the changes in the structure of feeling in the period from 1991 to 2012. As I stated in the introduction, mediation is conceived in this dissertation as a process of constructing meaning through communication by various media. Now I would like to elaborate on this concept by addressing theories of mediation linked to the idea of mediated memories.

In the book *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*, José van Dijck introduces the concept of a ‘shoebox’, a personal collection of materialised memories which ‘mediate not only remembrances of things past; they also

mediate relationships between individuals and groups of any kind [...], and they are made by media technologies (everything from pencils and cassette recorders to computers and digital cameras)' (van Dijck 2007, 1). Shoebox collections usually contain various objects such as CDs, cassettes or photographs. They could also include other objects – souvenirs, favourite toys or odd objects such as rocks or dried leaves – through which memories are mediated. These mediated memories are a formative part of people's identities: 'the accumulated items typically reflect the shaping of an individual in a historical time frame. But besides their personal value, collections of mediated memories raise interesting questions about a person's identity in a specific culture at a certain moment in time' (van Dijck 2009, 1). These items function as mediators between individuals and collectives, writing private lives into the fabric of the public. They also change people's perception of the world and shape the world people live in, further influencing memory practices and memory technologies.

Following this argument, I see the mediated arenas under analysis in the present study as similar to virtual shoeboxes, containing and circulating texts and artefacts that reflect and construct both personal and collective identities in Russian culture at a specific point in time. These arenas provide a framework in which to study the structure of feeling of people who were active during that period. These people – both producers and consumers of media content – form what Etienne Wenger (1998) has called a *community of practice*, understanding community as 'a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognisable as competence' (1998, 5). These communities of practice are the main context in which individuals 'work out common sense through mutual engagement' (1998, 47). Communities of practice use different media to shape their memories of the past and hence to shape the past as well. By communicating the memories of individuals and collectives, media shape those individuals and communities.

In addressing the media's ability to shape social reality, I approach the concept of mediation, which has been discussed and developed by Roger Silverstone (1999), among others. Although somewhat vague and all-encompassing, mediation nevertheless, as Nick Couldry argues, provides the necessary flexibility for conceptualising fluid and open-ended social changes (Couldry 2008). The term 'mediation' can be used to refer to the act of transmission of information through media or 'the overall effect of

media institutions existing in contemporary societies, the overall difference that media make by being there in our social world' (Couldry 2008, 379). Mediation 'describes the fundamentally, but unevenly, dialectical process in which institutionalised media of communication (the press, broadcast radio and television, and increasingly the world wide web), are involved in the general circulation of symbols in social life' (Silverstone 2002, 762). So defined, the term helps us understand how processes of communication change the social and cultural environments that support them, as well as the relations that individuals and institutions have to that environment and to each other. Couldry sees the process of mediation as two-way: media transform the environment, 'which in turn transforms the conditions under which any future media can be produced and understood' (Couldry 2008, 380). This is an important theoretical standpoint worth of studying in practice, especially when it comes to the investigations of how the past is represented in the media. The British sociologist John Urry, for example, writes that electronic media intrinsically change the way past and present are imagined (Urry 1996). It may be assumed that the too positive portrayal of the Soviet past and the unreflecting and uncritical representations of Soviet reality in the media shape certain opinions among the public, such as the opinion that the state must control the media and prevent the rapid spreading of western media content in order to preserve national identity and traditional values. When the time comes, the public, whose opinion on the role of the media has been formed by such a positive portrayal of a glorious past and the strong role of the state, may support or at least acquiesce in the curtailment of media freedoms. Of course, such a view minimises the agency of the audiences, seeing them as passive consumers who readily adopt the values propagated by media as well as disregards other factors, which can influence the processes of societal change (such as political and economic conditions). It is also difficult to measure to what extent the mediated past play role in such changes. Nevertheless, scholars pointed out that such dialectic relations are possible. José van Dijck puts media and memory in a very close interrelation. For Van Dijck 'memory is not mediated by media, but media and memory transform each other' (van Dijck 2007, 21). She uses the term 'mediation of memory', referring 'equally to our understanding of media in terms of memory [...] as well as to our comprehension of physiological memory in terms of media' (van Dijck 2007, 17). Although scholars have pointed out at dual relations

between media and memory, they have focused mainly on their linear, one-way relations – that is, on media shaping memory, rarely on media being shaped by memory. In this thesis I will also mainly focus on the one-way relations between media and nostalgia, focusing mainly on the ways media transforms memory. Nevertheless, I will briefly touch upon the question of how nostalgia for the past could transform media in chapter about television, when I will talk about *remediation*. Remediation is the concept developed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in their study *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (1999). Bolter and Grusin's conceptual framework emphasises the interactions and interdependencies between new and old media by introducing the term *remediation*. Remediation is understood as a complex process in which old media (television, radio, etc.) are recycled in new media (online and virtual reality technologies, etc.) with more realistic effects in a quest for 'immediacy': the medium seems to make itself invisible in favour of a virtual presence that it is used to create across geographical or temporal distances. Yet in doing so, new media also create situations of 'hypermediacy' in which new media texts and technologies are consciously focused on as such, highlighting the mediated condition of the communication process, and thus fostering a reflexive 'experience of the medium'. Bolter and Grusin explain how new media 'remediate' not only previous technologies, but also previous social conventions. This approach, in combination with the concept of mediated memories, could help us to understand the dynamics that occur when memories move between, and are transformed by, different mediating arenas.

2.3. Nostalgia

Nostalgia is a third key term in this study alongside structure of feeling and mediation. This section examines nostalgia as it is conceived in academic discourse. My presentation by no means covers all the written scholarly works on nostalgia, but it presents the key themes that are often brought up in connection with nostalgia. I have already referred to some of the literature on the topic, showing how different researchers have described specific forms of post-communist and post-Soviet nostalgia. In this section I will look at the history of the term, then present different typologies of nostalgia before introducing the two theoretical approaches to nostalgia that will be used primarily in this thesis.

2.3.1. Nostalgia in Conceptual History

Nostalgia as ‘a painful yearning to return home’ was first discussed in Johannes Hofer’s medical dissertation of 1688 in connection with his study of the medical condition of Swiss mercenaries (Hofer, 1688/1934). Hofer described ‘la Maladie du Pays’ as a severe sickness which could be lethal if not treated. Among doctors who worked during the 17th and the 18th centuries, this physical and emotional upheaval was seen as a ‘dis-Galich, Mikhail. 2013. Interview by the author. Tape recording. Moscow.order of the imagination’ (Hutcheon 2000b). The theoretical perspective on nostalgia as a physical and psychological condition was linked to a perception of it as epidemic. This corporeal ‘disease’ was believed to have symptoms ranging from melancholia and weeping to anorexia and suicide. The only cure for this painful condition was believed to be a return to the ‘native climate’ – literally, homecoming (Boyer 2011, 18). People experiencing nostalgia longed for their favourite soups and other products specific to their home regions. In other words, ‘memories of tastes and smells, the sound of familiar alpine herders’ melodies, and various other seemingly unimportant associations of home triggered bouts of nostalgia among the soldiers of fortune’ (Anderson 2010, 253).

By the 19th century, ‘the word began to lose its purely medical meaning, in part because the rise of pathologic anatomy and bacteriology had simply made it less medically credible’ (Hutcheon 2000, 194). The changes that occurred in the discourse of nostalgia during the 18th and the 19th centuries – the shift from a curable corporeal disease to an incurable psychological condition – may be connected with the societal changes brought about by industrialisation, migration and urbanisation, and with the notion of progress (Anderson 2010). Nostalgia was romanticised. It was seen as a ‘melancholic yearning for lost worlds, lost moments, lost ways of life, and those lost childhoods from which we appear to have been irreversibly severed’ (Anderson 2010, 254).

However, during the American Civil War, the medical discourse experienced a revival (Hutcheon 2000, 194). Nostalgia then became a common medical diagnosis based on strong physical symptoms. The methods of classification and diagnosis of nostalgia varied greatly, which led to numerous discrepancies in interpretations of what the disease was and how to treat it. It was classified mainly as ‘extreme mental depression’, a mental illness, melancholia (Anderson 2010, 256). Observing the

symptoms of nostalgia among both white and black soldiers, some doctors came to conclusion that the blacks were more subject to nostalgia than the whites, 'claiming exposure and ignorance as detrimental to the health and general vigour of black soldiers' (Anderson 2010, 260). This example reveals that the diagnosis of nostalgia was subject to people's personal opinions and even racial prejudices, rather than the result of appropriate medical research. Moreover, doctors found that the difficulty was not in diagnosing nostalgia, but in the fact that patients did not want to admit their mental 'illness' (Anderson 2010, 270). There may have been many reasons for this unwillingness, such as a reluctance to show a weakness that was considered feminine and therefore could impugn one's masculinity (Anderson 2010, 271). Thus nostalgia was understood within a gender discourse in which weakness and inclination to psychological disorders were considered more proper to females than to males, and nostalgia was therefore considered a negative phenomenon.

In the 20th century, psychiatrists showed an interest in nostalgia and it 'became less a *physical* than a *psychological* condition', changing from 'a *curable* medical illness to an *incurable* psychological condition (Hutcheon 2000, 194). What made this change possible 'was a shift in site from the spatial to the temporal. Nostalgia was no longer simply a yearning to return home' – in other words, it was a desire to return, not to a place, but to a time of youth (Hutcheon 2000, 194). 'Time, unlike space, cannot be returned to – ever; time is irreversible. And nostalgia becomes the reaction to that sad fact' (Hutcheon 2000, 194). The emotional upheaval connected with nostalgia was associated with a 'bitter-sweet yearning for things, persons or situations of the past' (Guffey 2006, 19).

Gradually, nostalgia has come to be viewed more as a sociological phenomenon that helps individuals to adapt during major transitions in life. Some kind of disruption of continuous development is an necessary condition for the emergence of nostalgia. An abrupt change can become a cause of cultural trauma, which then gives rise to nostalgic sentiments.⁴ In fact the juxtaposition of nostalgia and a rupture or traumatic event is closely connected with the idea of progress. Early and high modern

⁴ The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives several definitions of trauma: the first is 'any physical wound or injury'; the second refers to 'a physical shock following injury, characterised by a drop in body temperature, and mental confusion'; and the third describes 'an emotional shock following a stressful event, sometimes leading to long-term neurosis'. The concept of trauma in sociological theory was borrowed from medicine and psychiatry.

societies tend to idealise social change in terms of improvement and progress. Scholars pointed out that the future used to be considered as more dynamic than and superior to the past (Sztompka 2000, Huyssen 1994; Pickering and Keightly 2006).

Legg, building on the previous studies, suggested that 'while nostalgia denoted a positive attachment to a past real or imaginary home, trauma denoted the negative inability to deal effectively with a past event. While both conditions represent problematic engagements with the past, nostalgia often focuses on a time and place before or beyond a traumatic incident' (Legg 2004, 103). In this framework, both the destination of nostalgic longing and the traumatic event are located in the past and feed into contested memories activated in the present. With reference to the case at hand, what is seen as the trauma that causes growing nostalgic sentiments towards the past is not communism itself, but the period immediately after the fall of communism.

In regard to progress and modernisation, the post-1989 socio-economic and political changes have been identified among those causing traumatic encounters. While crime and inflation can be seen as universal – that is, affecting everyone – unemployment and degradation of status affected those who were less financially successful, who were deprived of both social position and economic wealth under the new capitalistic conditions (Sztompka 2000; Ivanova 2002; Wieliczko and Zuk 2003). Polish sociologist Piotr Sztompka's notion of trauma includes 'the damage inflicted by major social change on the cultural, rather than biological, tissue of a society' (Sztompka 2000, 450). He explained the concept of cultural trauma as relevant to the theory of social change and suggested that cultural trauma should be treated as 'a link in the ongoing chain of social changes; depending on the number of concrete circumstances, cultural trauma may be a phase in the constructive morphogenesis of culture or in the destructive cycle of cultural decay' (Sztompka 2000, 449).

Trauma, both as an objective and as a subjective condition, is usually based in some actual event. Some traumas can also be rooted in 'widespread imaginations' of traumatic events. Such disorientations do not necessarily cause cultural traumas. Potentially traumatic phenomena 'may not lead to actual trauma, because they are explained away, rationalised, reinterpreted in ways which make them invisible, innocuous, or even benign and beneficial' (Sztompka 2000, 457). A cultural trauma does not exist as long as it is not framed selectively and interpreted within

a certain cultural context (Sztompka 2000, 456–457). In other words, the maladjustments should be ‘*perceived and experienced* as problems, as something troubling or painful that demands healing’ (Sztompka 2000, 455; emphasis in original). In these cases the change from disorientation to cultural trauma ‘is manifested by the *intellectual, moral and artistic mobilisation of a society*, the appearance of a particular “meaning industry” (collective efforts to make sense of the situation)’ (Sztompka 2000, 455; emphasis in original).⁵ This is an important precondition that one should keep in mind when talking about the causes of nostalgic experiences. The Russian president Vladimir Putin’s statement that the collapse of the USSR was the major geopolitical catastrophe could be one example in which the discursive construction of the past embraces the period of the 1990s and the fall of the Soviet empire as a traumatic experience. That is, some changes were interpreted as traumatic. Cultural disorientation, believed to be informed by Western influences, new rules, generational conflicts, and the disruption and redefinition of historical developments and popular beliefs can be seen as some of the shifts that could cause cultural trauma. The ‘irreversible rupture’ in the historical continuum caused by the fall of the Soviet Union created a deepening feeling of crisis which was often articulated in the complaint that, after the fall of communism, all sense of stability and predictability and all unifying national ideas disappeared. This disruption of normality or regularity, the disorganisation of the orderly, self-evident universe of the Soviet Union, made possible the nostalgic longing for a lost home and lost stability. For those who felt comfortable in socialist societies, the difference between their past and present situations could be striking. They might interpret the disruption of their world and way of life as traumatic, and therefore more easily embrace nostalgia for socialism. Meanwhile those who had not supported the socialist system needed some time and ‘distance to conceptualise their emotional trauma in a way that might validate the socialist past’ (Creed 2010, 36).

Sztompka describes several strategies of active and passive adaptation to traumatic experiences: ‘A passive, ritualistic reaction would mean turning (or rather returning) to established traditions and routines, and

⁵ Piotr Sztompka sees three possible situations: ‘some of the interpretations construe such events as traumatic; some construe imagined, objectively non-existent events as traumatic; and some construe objectively traumatising events as non-traumatic’ (Sztompka 2000, 457).

cultivating them as safe hideouts to deflect cultural trauma' (Sztompka 2000, 461). According to Fred Davis, nostalgia then could be viewed as a passive adaptation to cultural trauma (Davis 1979). Individuals going through dramatic changes in their lives would be experiencing 'socio-temporal yearning for a different stage or quality of life', mainly youth, and 'a desire to recapture what life was at that time, whether innocent, euphoric, secure, intelligible' (Boyer 2011, 18).

Nostalgia as a strategy to cope with a problematic past can also include irony. In this case nostalgia is no longer a passive strategy of adaptation to life conditions. Svetlana Boym in 1995 identified ironic nostalgia as a particular subtype, while the Romanian scholar Diana Georgescu has called for 'the analysis of the critical potential of irony to challenge mainstream memory discourses' (Georgescu 2010, 156). She proposes the term *counter-memory* to indicate that certain memories are not included in the master narrative, but function as a disruption of widely accepted discourses. These alternative memory practices are cast in ironic modes, which of course does not mean they are not serious. The Canadian literature scholar Linda Hutcheon understands irony as a social and political issue which involves power-based relations and communication (Hutcheon 1994, 1). She argues that irony 'has an evaluative edge and manages to provoke emotional responses into those who "get" it and those who don't, as well as in its targets and in what some people call its "victims"' (Hutcheon 1994, 1). She understands irony as a discursive practice or strategy: 'irony isn't irony until it is interpreted as such – at least by the intending ironist, if not the intended receiver. Someone attributes irony; someone makes it happen' (Hutcheon 1994, 6). In the past, irony was mainly theorised from the ironic encoder's point of view and therefore understood as implicitly or explicitly 'intentionalist' (Hutcheon 1994, 111). Intentional ironies are usually understood as 'stable', overt and capable of being reconstructed by the interpreter. But 'the only way to be sure that a statement was intended ironically is to have a detailed knowledge of the personal, linguistic, cultural and social references of the speaker and his audience' (Gaunt 1989/2008, 25). Some ironies are interpreted, but not intended, as ironic. That means that the strategy of interpretation is one of the most common manifestations of irony: hearing or seeing irony is an act that makes irony possible (Hutcheon 1994, 112). Hutcheon believed that the distinction between intentional and non-intentional irony is in fact a false one because 'all

irony happens intentionally, whether the attribution is made by the encoder or the decoder. Interpretation is, in a sense, an intentional act on the part of the interpreter' (Hutcheon, 1994: 113). The interpreter is not a passive receiver of irony: he or she makes 'irony happen' by an 'intentional act, different from but not unrelated to the ironist's intention to be ironic' (Hutcheon 1994, 118). If irony's intentional function is activated and put into play by the interpreter, the irony would then be 'a function of reading' (Hutcheon 1994, 117) or would 'complete itself in the reading' (Said 1983, 87; quoted in Hutcheon 1994, 117). 'It would not be something intrinsic to a text, but rather something that results from the act of construing carried out by the interpreter who works within a context of interpretive assumptions' (Hutcheon 1994, 117). That means interpreters are agents who make irony happen, while irony becomes 'a modality of perception – or, better, of attribution – of both meaning and evaluative attitude' (Hutcheon 1994, 117). The participatory nature of irony involves 'culturally-shared knowledge of the rules, conventions, expectations' in a particular cultural context. This context, the interpretative community, is therefore necessary for irony to happen. Ironist and interpreter exist in social relations and operate within a communicative situation, and therefore the responsibility for the ironic situation is shared. 'The intended audience, for instance, may not end up being the actual one; it might reject the ironic meaning, or find it inappropriate or objectionable in some way; it may simply choose not to see irony in a given utterance' (Hutcheon 1994, 118). Irony, as a learned skill, involves "social cognitive development": that is, the ability to infer both the knowledge shared by speaker and addressee and the attitude of the speaker toward what is being discussed' (Hutcheon 1994, 116).

Irony and nostalgia are often considered key components of today's culture. It may be difficult to imagine how nostalgia, seen as a sentimental longing for the past, can be combined with irony, which tends to be understood as the rather edgy opposite of sentimentality. However, there are some obvious points of convergence between the two phenomena.

Like irony, nostalgia should be perceived as an emotional response and a discursive practice which is directed towards the construction of identities. The sentimental longing for a time located in the past becomes an important precondition and a basis for setting in motion the process of narration through which people make sense of their lives and the surrounding world. While some people are more prone to melancholic

travels, others review their past and present with a pinch of salt and smile. The degree and type of nostalgia depend to a great extent on personal characteristics and present life circumstances. Yet nostalgia cannot be a characteristic immanent in a subject, but is a response to a temporal and/or spatial displacement that happens (or is made to happen) under certain conditions. These conditions generally include a real or imagined experience of loss and some kind of reminder of that loss which stimulates the emergence of memories. Both the loss and the emotional response to it are constructed discursively – in other words, these experiences are *interpreted* as nostalgic. For example, a film cannot be nostalgic, but it can be interpreted as nostalgic by its producer or by its viewer. When a producer intends a film to have a nostalgic effect on its viewers, we may say the film has an intentional nostalgic effect; and when a viewer interprets a film as nostalgic, we may say it has a voluntary nostalgic effect.

Nostalgia is both produced by and produces emotional and affective experiences: our minds react to nostalgic stimuli perceived through our bodies – tastes, smells, appearances, etc. Because it has such an affective potential, nostalgia becomes a part of larger material and discursive structures. As both a discursive and a bodily experience, it becomes part of the political sphere and has the potential to contribute to the constructions and reconstructions of nation-states, while nostalgic emotions become a site of collective politics. Nostalgia's potential for denying and/or degrading the present as it is lived, and thus making the idealised (and therefore always absent) past into a site of immediacy, presence and authenticity, has the potential to become an important tool, and has been used with varying success for the construction of strong nationalist discourses.

Susan Stewart's study *On Longing* calls nostalgia a 'social disease', defining it as 'the repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of all repetition' (Stewart; 1984, 23). Stewart suggests that the major difference between nostalgia and irony is that, unlike the knowingness of irony (a mark of the fall from innocence), nostalgia is utopian (Stewart 1984, 23). That is a challenging argument since it seems to be contradicted by Boym's concept of 'ironic' nostalgia (Boym 1995). However, I will argue in the following chapters that some nostalgias seem to be simultaneously ironic and sentimentally utopian. Such a dual character of nostalgia does not necessarily mean that the subject experiencing nostalgia is not serious or reflexive towards the object of nostalgia. On the contrary, he or she can experience the whole spectrum of emotional and cognitive responses.

Linda Hutcheon points to a crucial quality of nostalgia which is a major aspect of my theoretical understanding of it:

To call something ironic or nostalgic is, in fact, less a *description* of the *entity itself* than an *attribution* of a quality of *response*. Irony is not something *in* an object that you either ‘get’ or fail to ‘get’: irony ‘happens’ for you (or, better, you *make* it ‘happen’) when two meanings, one said and the other unsaid, come together, usually with a certain critical edge. Likewise, nostalgia is not something you ‘perceive’ *in* an object; it is what you ‘feel’ when two different temporal moments, past and present, come together for you and, often, carry considerable emotional weight. In both cases, it is the element of response – of active participation, both intellectual and affective – that makes for the power. (Hutcheon 2000b, 22; emphasis in the original)

Because the element of *active attribution* is not brought up, ‘the politics of both irony and nostalgia are often written off as quietistic at best’ (Hutcheon 2000b, 22). But both irony and nostalgia are ‘transideological’, which means that they can be ‘made to “happen” by (and to) anyone of any political persuasion’ (Hutcheon 2000b, 22). This is indeed an important contribution to the understanding of nostalgia which will form a basis for my analytical work on the empirical cases in the following chapters.

2.3.2. Typologies of Nostalgia

The conceptual complexity and, to a certain extent, the vagueness of the word nostalgia have led to the elaboration of different typologies which may help us in navigating and differentiating between various nuances of it, and which relate to my third research question concerning precisely the different definitions of nostalgia adopted by various actors.

Fred Davis identifies two dimensions in which nostalgic or similar experiences may differ: first, the personal vs. collective nature of the experience and, second, the basis of the feeling in direct vs. indirect experience (Davis 1979). Personal experiences are grounded in memories that are specific to the individual and differ significantly across society, while collective experiences originate in cultural phenomena that the members of a society share. ‘Direct experience refers back to events in the individual's own life, while indirect experience results from stories told by friends or family members or from information in books, movies, or other

media' (Holak, Matveev and Havlena 2008, 173). The consumer and marketing researchers William J. Havlena and Susan L. Holak, building on this division, propose a fourfold classification of nostalgic experience: (1) personal nostalgia (direct individual experience); (2) interpersonal nostalgia (indirect individual experience); (3) cultural nostalgia (direct collective experience); (4) virtual nostalgia (indirect collective experience) (Havlena and Hovlak 2007, 650). This classification of nostalgic experience is especially useful in consumer research, but the approach is problematic since people's memories are socially constructed in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish between collective direct and indirect experiences, or to draw the boundary between personal and impersonal experiences.

The media scholar Zala Volčič suggests a different categorisation of nostalgia and distinguishes three types of 'Yugo-nostalgia': (1) revisionist nostalgia, which is a political phenomenon that utilises the past as part of a political program of reunification involving the rewriting of history in accordance with contemporary political priorities; (2) aesthetic nostalgia, which is a cultural phenomenon calling for the preservation and worshipping of a unique past and its culture as something special, but without exploiting it for political or commercial purposes; and (3) escapist or utopian nostalgia, a commercial phenomenon that celebrates and exploits the longing for an idyllic past. This type of nostalgia tends to be the most ahistorical because it avoids historical narratives, relying instead upon commoditised symbols of identity.

I will present Svetlana Boym's understanding of nostalgia in greater detail since it is the most directly relevant to the topic of the present study, the nostalgic elements in post-Soviet Russian structures of feeling. In her trailblazing *Future of Nostalgia* (2001), Boym suggests another typology. She points out that the word 'nostalgia', originating in the Greek *nostos* (return home) and *algia* (longing), means a longing for a home that does not and perhaps never did exist (Boym 1995, 284; 2001, xiii). This nostalgic longing is directed towards the temporal and spatial distance between the longing subject and longed for object, and the loss of the object is the primary condition for the subject to experience nostalgia. Boym at first distinguished between 'two kinds of nostalgia: utopian (reconstructive and totalising) and ironic (inclusive and fragmentary)' (Boym 1995, 285). Some years later, she elaborated more on these two kinds and called them the *restorative* and the *reflective*, where 'restorative nostalgia stresses

nostos and attempts a trans-historical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming – wistfully, ironically, desperately’ (Boym 2001, xviii). While restorative nostalgia aims at reconstructing the lost home, often in association with religious or nationalist revivals, reflective nostalgia has no home. Reflective nostalgia is embodied in the transient movement, not in any arrival at a safe destination. ‘If restorative nostalgia ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of homes and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialise time, reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalises space’ (Boym 2001). Restorative nostalgia thinks of itself, not as nostalgia, but as truth and tradition, and protects a kind of absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls truths and traditions into doubt, leaving space for contradictions. Restorative nostalgia ‘knows two main plots – the return to origins and conspiracy’ (Boym 2001, xviii). Reflective nostalgia on the other hand makes it possible ‘to distinguish between national memory that is based on a single plot of national identity, and social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define the individual memory’ (Boym 2001, xviii).

Paul Grainge (2002) and Andrew Higson (2014) divide nostalgia into modern and postmodern nostalgia, referring to Svetlana Boym (2001) and Fredric Jameson (1991) as the most prominent scholars in this field. Here I suggest looking at the conception of nostalgia as both a modern and a postmodern phenomenon, thus preparing the ground for a further theoretical discussion building on the empirical material presented in the following chapters. I look at both paradigms represented by these scholars as two kinds of emotional organisations in which nostalgia is seen as more central to the postmodernist mentality than to the previously dominant modernist one.

‘Modernity connotes a range of different associative fields, each of which offers something valid but also contains some problematic implications. Discussions of modernity may, for example, focus upon recent times, the very present period, in contrast to the more distant past, which is studied by historians’ (Fornäs 1995, 19). Because modernity is interested in the present ‘as contrasted with the past’, it has a historical dimension (Fornäs 1995, 19). The concept of modernity is based on the changes in *historical time*: ‘the more a particular time is experienced as a new temporality, as “modernity”, the more that demands made of the

future increase' (Koselleck 2004, 3). According to Koselleck, modernity means a human desire to control the future as much as possible. Controlling the future is only possible by commanding the present and the past. Commanding the past is possible in turn by having power over history and memory. In this case, 'nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition' (Boym 2001, xv). 'At first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time – the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dream' (Boym 2001, xv). 'Modernism is about breaking with the past and with tradition, at least in principle, while nostalgia is about longing for the past, a wistful remembering of tradition'; 'modernism and nostalgia are therefore contradictory responses to modernity' (Higson 2014, 125).

Andrew Higson distinguishes between temporal and spatial nostalgia, where temporal nostalgia is a longing for the time that is past, and spatial nostalgia is a longing for the space of home – in other words, homesickness (Higson 2014, 123). He argued that the modern version of nostalgia is in fact temporal nostalgia: it is an 'act of imagination' of the earlier time, 'things, people, conditions and values associated with that time' (Higson 2014, 123). However, the longing to return to this fondly remembered or imagined past is tinted with the sense that there is little hope of a return (Higson 2014, 124). The key description of this nostalgia is an 'excessively sentimental' and 'wistful' longing for the past remembered as a much more perfect time than the present. The modernist version of nostalgia is essentially structured around a tension between the different values attributed to past and present. 'The present is marked as an unsatisfactory place', while the past is imagined as a time and place more perfect and more desirable than the present, 'where little is lacking and where the prevailing values and sentiments' are cherished (Higson 2014, 124). Nostalgic narrative suggests a loss and plays on the idea of recovery, 'projecting the subject imaginatively into a comfortably closed past' (Higson 2014, 124). This desire of returning home usually takes one of two forms which are also identified by Boym in her distinction between reflective and restorative nostalgia: either a return to an ideal childhood as a time of innocence, or a patriotic reconstruction of the homeland as an ideal place, where the homeland is synonymous with the nation. This

image of a homeland represented in a nostalgic mood has a strong potential to feed into nationalist rhetoric and political nostalgia:

This modern version of nostalgia is then not a spontaneous response to an actual historical moment, but a way of relating to a past imagined from the point of view of the present; it is a response to and a reorganisation of contemporary experience. This imagined past is constructed in terms of what the present is felt to lack, it is the imaginary site of plenitude in relation to the experience of loss or lack in the present. This nostalgia is an act of imagination, a fantasy experience, but one in which an image of the past is used to enter into a dialogue with the present. (Higson 2014, 124)

Hence modern nostalgia is ‘more attuned to traditional cultural values and formations’ (Higson 2014, 125). Where the modern era believed in cultural, political, social and economic improvement and the inevitability of progress, postmodernity on the other hand is the state of scepticism towards the celebration of progress and suspicion towards ideological authority, universal theories and grand narratives (Sim 2001/2002, 340). For postmodernist philosophy, the past was a treasury of different styles available for pastiche and bricolage. Irony was used as a strategy for unpacking various historical epochs in order to mix and match them in artistic appropriations. If sentimental nostalgia was a consequence of the previous fin-de-siècle – the declining 19th century – then some postmodernist nostalgia, as Hutcheon named it, is of an ‘ironised order’: ‘the act of ironising (while still implicitly invoking) nostalgia undermines modernist assertions of originality, authenticity, and the burden of the past, even as it acknowledges their continuing (but not paralyzing) validity as aesthetic concerns’ (Hutcheon 2000, 23).

Mixing and matching different epochs, postmodernist nostalgia can be characterised as not temporal, but *atemporal* nostalgia, ‘a nostalgia that therefore seems to stand outside of time’, and which easily overcomes any tension between past and present because postmodernist nostalgia focuses on the recent past (Higson 2014, 125). ‘If modernist nostalgia aligned itself with middle-brow, post-modern nostalgia has a more populist sensibility, focusing much more resolutely on relatively recent popular culture and on the mass-produced and industrial’ (Higson 2014, 125).

If modern nostalgia lingers on the bittersweet, wistful, melancholic aspect of the experience, much of the current culture and business of

nostalgia seems surprisingly sweet and not at all bitter: it is celebratory, without also being wistful, perhaps not least because the key aspect of the *culture* of nostalgia is indeed the *business* of nostalgia, where the past is no longer lost, no longer irrecoverable, but eminently within reach. (Higson 2014, 126)

In other words, if modern nostalgia is an experience of wistful longing and a 'fantasy of returning home, not an actual journey home', then postmodern nostalgia is a celebration of easily accessible and collectible styles of the past (Boym 2001, 307). It retains nothing of melancholia and wistfulness, the key elements of modernist nostalgia. The postmodernist nostalgia 'is no longer about loss and the irrecoverable, but about the found, about discovery and enjoyment' (Higson 2014, 126). Postmodernist nostalgia is organised through consumer practices and through styles; it recovers and re-brands the past. 'In other cases, nostalgia is simply a brand name, a means of marketing particular sorts of products: memory is often not even invoked, let alone wistfulness' (Higson 2014, 128). The experience of the past is totally different: the past is celebrated, not because it can now be recovered, but because it was never lost.

Jameson argues that the nostalgic sensibility of postmodernism reduces history to mere visual style, the spectacle of pastness. Pastness in postmodern nostalgia is precisely signalled through particular visual styles, and as a result all sense of critical and historical distance is erased (Jameson 1991, 19–21). Historicity has been replaced by a new aesthetic: 'nostalgia mode', an 'art language where the past is realised through stylistic connotation and consumed as pastiche. This new mode can also be seen in terms of a new structure of feeling, as it implies a transformed organisation of sentiments and emotions in wide circles of the population. Symptomatic of a crisis in the post-modern historical imagination, the nostalgia mode satisfies a desperate craving for history while reinforcing the past as "a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum"' (Jameson 1991, 18). Nostalgia mode is divorced from any sense of longing and even from memory. It is instead a cultural style. In mnemonic terms, the effective content of nostalgic longing has been rivalled and replaced by the contentlessness of nostalgic affect.

Building on Jameson's concept of the nostalgic mode, Paul Grainge has pointed out that Jameson fails to account for the negotiation of memory and identity by the nostalgic mode. Grainge claims that 'by lamenting the indiscriminate pastiche that distinguishes late capitalism, he gives little

sense that meaningful narratives of history or cultural memory can be produced through the recycling and/or hybridisation of past styles' (Grainge 2002, 6). Grainge has more belief in nostalgia as a mode than both Higson and Jameson. He sees a potential for meaningful narratives in aesthetic nostalgia as well. On this point I side with Grainge. There is something in the polarity between 'modern' and 'postmodern' that worries me. I agree that the typology is useful in mapping a very complex cultural phenomenon, but the dichotomising reduction of nostalgia to two opposite types tends to simplify the phenomenon too much.

2.4. Concluding Remarks

In concluding this chapter I would like to summarise briefly the theoretical background of this thesis. I will study the change in the structure of feeling in the 1990s and the first decade of the 2000s through the lens of mediated post-Soviet nostalgia. By 'mediated post-Soviet nostalgia' I mean nostalgia for the Soviet past which is constructed through various mediated platforms and discursive practices produced in dialogue between the content producers and the audiences. Because the transformation of a structure of feeling depends on the succession of generations, in my empirical analysis I will study how different generations of Russians and communities of practice articulate their identities through nostalgic discourses. Studying how the actors involved in the production of these discourses articulate their identities will also allow me to identify how nostalgia as a phenomenon is defined and what connection it has to the contemporary politics of memory in Russia. After having tested various definitions and conceptual models, I will make use of several theoretical perspectives in my analysis. In reviewing changes in the dominant structure of feeling, I will employ Svetlana Boym's distinction between reflective and restorative nostalgia, which I will link to the process of identity formation performed through strategic uses of the past and through the construction of collective memory. In analysing nostalgia, I will also make use of Linda Hutcheon's theoretical ideas on nostalgia as an emotional response and a discursive practice. The choice of these theoretical tools is explained by the empirical findings in a complex reciprocal process that I will expose in detail in the following chapters.

3. Material and Methodological Framework

3.1. Case Studies

In order to answer the questions regarding the cross-media phenomenon described above, I will build my analysis on several empirical cases studies corresponding to different arenas of mediation – restaurants, television, fashion, and the Internet – which contribute to the structure of feeling of the chosen period. It was the mutual relations between these different mediating arenas and their importance in the production of representations of the post-Soviet past that motivated the selection of cases: each case reveals a new dimension of the mediation of the Soviet past. The tendencies that first appeared in nostalgic theme restaurants were further developed in theatre and television, then in social networking websites and in fashion. These examples are by no means representative of the whole complex phenomenon, but they are indicative of the processes taking place in the society in a given period. As the examples indicate, the main object of study is visual culture – the visual construction of the social reality (Mitchell 2002, 170). Brief references to theatre plays, art and museums are also included among the empirical cases since they help us to understand in greater detail the differences and similarities in the mediation of the past between the cases selected as the primary empirical material, which are drawn from television, fashion, restaurant interior design and Internet offerings. Film is not included in the analysis because the cinema productions in which the Soviet past is portrayed are often based on television series or are screen adaptations of literary works.¹

Because the preservation of memory about life in the USSR is one of the main intentions behind these examples, they can be treated as sites of memory: ‘a lieu de mémoire is any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community’ (Nora 1996, xvii). These sites of memory, I believe, illustrate important developments and perspectives on the past, notably trends

¹ A rare exception is the film *Stilyagi* (‘Hipsters’, 2008), directed by V. Todorovsky.

which, when set in their political and social context, help us to understand the complex process of production and mediation of memory. At the same time, I believe these cases are components of the structure of feeling. Each of these arenas of mediation is represented by several examples: five television programmes and a cable television channel, two fashion brands, one online community, and one restaurant, where the focus is on the organisation of its interior and atmosphere.

Visual stimuli in the form of interior design elements are the first object of analysis. I will start with one nostalgic theme restaurant that opened in the 1990s, analysing it first and foremost from the perspective of the inhabiting of space, and then relating it with culinary nostalgia. After analysing representations of the past through designs of material objects, I will conclude with a brief analysis of several museum collections to illustrate the change in collecting practices. I begin with the restaurant in order to show one of the very first examples of the return of the Soviet past in the present, and to point out important tendencies in representational practices and discursive strategies, which will be developed further in later cases. The restaurant made visible how essential categories such as space and time were constructed, and was the site where many of the key tendencies originated which later became more pronounced. Among the many 'nostalgic' restaurants that opened in the 1990s, including *Pokrovskie vorota* ('Pokrov Gates', Moscow), *Stolovaya No. 57* ('Diner No. 57', Moscow), and *Zov Il'icha* ('Lenin's Mating Call', St. Petersburg), I have chosen *Petrovich* (Moscow) because it was one of the first such restaurants to be founded and still exists today. The decision to include an analysis of museum exhibitions was motivated by the desire to illustrate how the practice of collecting material objects of the Soviet past in a spatial setting has developed, and how this practice of making sense of the Soviet period changed when institutions took over this domain.

In the next chapter, I examine practices of representation of the Soviet past in dramatic forms of culture: theatre and television. The experience of theatre adds a new dimension to the perception of the past achieved in a theme restaurant space by providing a more strongly prestructured dramatic narrative and a more ambitious work of art, which is a hallmark of what is generally understood as high artistic culture. I examine two theatre plays directed by Mark Rozovsky, *Pesni Nashego Dvora* and *Pesni Nashej Kommunal'ki*, which ran during the second half of the 1990s in the Moscow theatre *U Nikitskikh Vorot*. In close connection with the plays, I

then study five television programmes (three that were broadcast in the 1990s and one from the 2000s) and one cable television channel (which went on the air in 2004) in order to illuminate the different ways of representing the Soviet past and the changes that occurred in these representations. Because the formats and content of two of the television programmes were similar to those of the theatre plays, it is instructive to juxtapose the examples from theatre and television to see common tendencies and differences in the representations.

The focus on television is warranted by the significance of that medium in Russia and its importance in the mediation of memories of the Soviet era in general. After 1991, television became the main source of information for the majority of the population, and profound changes in the structure and forms of media ownership and strategies of mediated content production then transformed the existing journalistic culture. Russia in the 1990s was defined as a ‘watching nation with the TV replacing newspapers at the top of the media hierarchy’, as TV was ‘the only national medium more or less equally distributed nationwide’ (Vartanova 2002, 24–25). In the 2000s, television maintained its dominant position as the main information and entertainment medium in Russia, binding great numbers of viewers to the blue screens (Vartanova 2013). Television also affected representations of the Soviet period in fashion, as illustrated in the earlier chapter on fashion design. Television in the 1990s is represented in this study by three highly rated and award-winning shows that were produced and broadcast in that decade, namely *Namedni: Nasha Era* (‘Recently: our era’), *Staraia Kvartira* (‘The old flat’) and *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* (‘Old songs about what matters’). My primary focus is on how these programmes mediated memory in this period. I also analyse two TV series from the 2000s, *Nasha Gordost* (‘Our pride’) and *Legendi SSSR* (‘Legends of the USSR’). These TV series were chosen because of their content, because they were officially sanctioned, and because I was able to access script material and to interview producers. To conclude this chapter, I draw on material from the cable channel *Nostalgia*, which began broadcasting in 2004, to illustrate how nostalgic time travel to the past by means of television can become an alternative version of the present. The *Nostalgia* channel is unique in that reruns of Soviet films and programmes coexist in it with new productions.

Fashion is the next object of analysis in this dissertation. In fact, it was fashion that provided the initial impetus to begin this study. The apparently sudden outbreak of nostalgic fashions in the early and mid-2000s, including high-priced designer pieces with printed images of Soviet cartoon characters, made me wonder whether nostalgia for the Soviet times was so much in vogue that people would spend money to have them in their wardrobe. The search for the origins and continuing motivation of this Soviet mania brought this dissertation into being. This commercial use of the past made me think about the different directions this trend might take, and demonstrated that the nostalgia industry was developing at full speed. I analyse this phenomenon in two fashion brands which illustrate different commercial uses of the Soviet past. I selected the brands – Denis Simachev and Antonina Shapovalova – for their popularity, their visibility in the media, and the different ways in which they use the Soviet heritage. I also believe that these two fashion brands correspond to the trends I spotted later in the television programmes produced in the 1990s. Denis Simachev may be considered to be the more successful of the two, but Antonina Shapovalova, who is a politician as well as a designer, uses the Soviet past in a significant way as a propaganda tool for the Putin regime. In order to place the two designers' cultural references, produced in the mid-2000s, in a historical perspective, I review the late socialist period to see how fashion was used in Moscow's artistic circles as a means of deconstructing the symbols of Soviet power.

In the next chapter, I make a brief foray into Internet archives and online communities where images, films and TV programmes produced during the communist era rapidly flourished, alongside individual memories of those born in the USSR. I connect the practices of collecting, starting at the restaurant Petrovich in the 1990s, with the collection of memories in digital form in the online depositories, taking the discussion of the role of the medium to a new level. Among many online resources that stimulate users' nostalgic sentiments, I have selected the Internet project *Encyclopaedia Nashego Detstva* ('Encyclopaedia of our childhood', <http://e-n-d.ru/>) which was named the 'Archive of the Year' in the 2007 'Rotor' awards, the professional awards for Russian-language Internet sites.

3.2. Sources

In addressing the aims of this dissertation and pursuing answers to the research questions, I draw on a wide variety of sources which I collected on four one-month field trips between 2011 and 2013. These sources can be divided into three categories that roughly correspond to the three strands of media studies, namely the study of content, of production, and of reception.

In regard to content, for the chapter on fashion I have used archive material available on the official websites of the fashion brands studied. This material consisted of press releases on the collections and catwalk photographs and videos, showing what the collections consisted of and how they were presented to the audience. For examples of dress created in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I have relied mainly on images provided by the online archive of 1980s youth subcultures *kompost.ru*, launched by Misha Buster, and on images given to me by the artist Alexander Petlura.² For the chapter on television I have used video recordings of the analysed programmes available online and on DVD, and I have provided screenshots where my arguments call for visual illustration. For the analysis of the Nostalgia cable TV channel, my sources included digital recordings of the programmes and broadcast schedules available on the channel's website. For the content analysis of the two theatre plays, I attended performances in the theatre and also used a video recording available online. For the study of the restaurant Petrovich, I draw upon field notes taken during several ethnographic visits to the restaurant. For the analysis of the online community, I have used material available on the platform, including forum discussions and users' posts and comments.

Existing studies of mediated representations of the Soviet past have generally focused mainly on analysing media texts and production processes (Novikova and Dulo 2011; Morenkova 2012; Abramov and Chestiakova 2012; Zvereva 2004; Oushakine 2007). One of the main advantages of the present study is its inclusion of the perspective of media producers and content creators in order to gain insights into how they came up with their ideas: how the material was collected and selected, and how the product was delivered to the audiences. This enables us to form a more meaningful picture of what Stuart Hall calls the encoding process

² Misha Buster is his own 'custom' romanisation of his name.

(Hall 1980). For the study of the production process, I conducted interviews with media and content producers – that is, with programme editors, fashion designers, and directors. Naturally a study of the production process cannot rely only on interviews with producers: they may have their own agendas, and/or might mistrust me and therefore be reluctant to reveal information that would be important to the study. Another problem which I encountered during my field work is the occasional inaccuracy of the information that the producers did provide. As I was collecting information about content which in some cases had been created almost ten years previously, I had to rely on the memories of the people who had worked on the production of that content. As memories are shaped in present, and often in the process of recollection in dialogue with another person, the information I was receiving was coloured by the emotions of the present day and adjusted to the reality of the moment the interviews took place. Taking that into consideration, I looked for alternative sources of information, such as interviews with the producers which were conducted at the time when the content was produced. Interviews with the producers seemed to be the only possible source of certain information about the production process: participant observation for example was out of question, because the programmes and fashion designs to be analysed were produced before I began work on this dissertation.

Snowball sampling proved successful in finding informants. My interviewees were eager to share their contacts with me. However, despite of its obvious advantages, such as the possibility to reach out to interesting potential informants, this method also had some drawbacks. There was a risk that the informants selected could be dominated by one circle of friends who referred mainly to each other, raising the profile of their own contributions and cultural status and possibly excluding and even hiding competing actors in the field. Some potential contacts could have been kept from me for personal reasons. Anticipating such weaknesses in the process, I always tried to balance the information received from my informants by identifying experts and influential people in the field through media surveys.

I conducted individual interviews, which took place mainly in private settings, either in the home or in the studio of the interviewee. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain detailed information about the phenomenon under study, including the experts' personal points of view

and perception of their own activities related to the production of mediated representations of the Soviet past. To that end, I designed my interviews as open conversations, using the interview agenda only for my own orientation. My intention was to make the interviewee talk about the topics with no more than occasional interference by me. I decided always to ask the main questions, but ask subsequent questions only if they tied in with the conversation. I also asked comprehension questions to understand the meaning of the interviewee's statements and key terms. Interviews consisted of three main parts: a warming up, in which I asked the interviewee to talk about herself and her activities; a section on general history of nostalgic phenomena in Russia, in which I asked them to identify the main actors and representations; and a section on the future scenario, in which I asked the interviewee to imagine how these phenomena will develop in the future. The purpose of this question was to see whether my respondents saw any signs of development and could predict whether changes would happen. Most of them either did not answer the question or answered it briefly by stating that they did not know where the situation would lead, and only time would tell.³

As it happened, these interviews provided a totally new insight into the object of this study, nostalgia. Articulations of nostalgia in the interviews with producers brought into light essential issues of agency, definitions of terms, and relations between academic and common language about nostalgia. In this light, the academic discourse on nostalgia also became an object of my study, so that scholarly work on nostalgia is not only a secondary source and the basis for its theoretical framework, but also a primary source for the study of that academic discourse.

Because meaning is produced in the process of communication, in which audiences are not just passive receivers of the intended message, but active collaborators in decoding it, I also examined the reception of the content by journalists and media critics. Articles that criticise, describe or review the television shows, theatre plays and fashion collections analysed comprise another pool of sources I have used. I have accessed them mainly through the online archives of the newspapers and journals in which they were published. I have also consulted forums where people discussed TV programmes or theatre plays. Interviews with media producers can also be included in this section because the interviewees often reviewed and commented on content created by

³ For the interview agenda and questions, see Appendix 1

others, acting as recipients of that media content. This is of course limited data from which to draw detailed conclusions on how audiences perceived mediations of the Soviet past. As I did not have the capacity to conduct extensive audience research, I have used this material only for brief illustrations of opposing opinions on the subject matter.

3.3. Analytical Methods

While I was committed to my selection of empirical material, I discovered that there was no obvious analytical tool which could be applied to analyse that entire collection. From the beginning, I resolved to use qualitative methods that would help me understand what the collected material says about the structure of feeling in the period under study. Reading the empirical material closely, I realised that there was a clear feature common to all of the data collected: fashion designs, restaurant interiors and television programmes all presented a meaningful story about life in Soviet Russia and/or made an attempt to construct a Russian cultural identity. I realised with time that the lack of formal analytical steps allowed a freedom and flexibility in data analysis which might have been lost if I had used more rigid methods. For the purpose of portraying the phenomenon of post-Soviet nostalgia as one of the elements of the structure of feeling, I have therefore chosen to work with a thick description of my cases, by providing a detailed account of my cases and trying to investigate cultural patterns in the given context (Geertz 1973, 5–6, 9–10). In regard to television programmes, I paid special attention to how the film clips are positioned, how they recounted a specific moment of Russian history, and what the makers of these productions told me about the process of their creation and their contribution to the process of remembering. In studying the theatre plays, I paid attention to the stories narrated in the songs that comprised these plays, and to how the director of these plays talked about them. In regard to the restaurant and the museum exhibition, I was particularly interested in the organisation of space and the process of collecting material artefacts, and in how their founders argued for the need of their foundation. I have described in detail the overall construction of the online community and website where Internet users' memories and reflections were collected, and examined that construction in relation to what the site's founder said about it.

In interpreting my data I drew on the hermeneutic tradition. The process of understanding the phenomenon of nostalgia as a whole and the collected data was hermeneutic in that my thinking constantly travelled back and forth in the hermeneutic circle between the particular case study and the overarching tendencies. I see the production and mediation of what is known as post-Soviet nostalgia as deeply rooted in the Russian cultural landscape and in global cultural developments. Hence I apply a hermeneutic approach to the mediated forms of Soviet nostalgia to bring out the meanings of a text from the perspective of its author and of the interpretive communities that encountered the text and unfolded its meaning in a given period.

Among the theorists of the hermeneutic tradition, I was inspired by the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur, who merged aspects of Hans-Georg Gadamer's and Jurgen Habermas's positions on hermeneutics and argued that the hermeneutic act must always be accompanied by critical reflection, while the field of tradition and historical texts should not be neglected. In other words, attention must be given to the social and historical context within which the text was produced and used (Ricoeur 1976; 1981). That is why, while collecting data on my empirical cases, I also gathered and analysed contextual data including magazines, newspapers articles, and interviews with experts and journalists. I examined this material in relation to the social-historical moment, which involves an assessment of the text's producer, its intentional recipient, its referent in the world, and the context in which the text was produced, transmitted and received.

According to Gadamer, we 'never know a historical work as it originally appeared to its contemporaries. We have no access to its original context of production or to the intentions of its author' (Ramberg and Gjesdal 2009). Although I have interviewed producers of TV shows, artists, designers and a theatre director, I realise that their opinions were coloured by the contemporary context in which they lived when these interviews were conducted. The understanding of and nostalgia for the past are constantly in a process of production and development. Not only does the past handed down to future generations through the complex and ever-changing fabric of interpretations get richer and more complex with time, but the interpretations of the interpretations of the past also

become more complex with time since the reception history (Wirkungsgeschichte) of past texts and events continually adds further layers of interpretation and meaning.

Following Stuart Hall, I try to 'read' Russian culture 'for the values and meanings embodied in its patterns and arrangements: as if they were certain kinds of "texts"' (Hall 1986, 33). I do so in order to study the tendencies and patterns prevalent at a particular moment in Russian society. In this reading, the triangle of media, culture and society is a mode of reflection in which all three elements are closely intertwined. Culture here is understood as 'the sum of the available descriptions through which societies make sense of and reflect their common experience' (Hall 1986, 35). Art, literature, and media are 'part of the general process which creates conventions and institutions, through which the meanings that are valued by the community are shared and made active' (Williams 1961, 55). Moreover, I look not only at the particular cases, but also at how these cases, or cultural forms, are related to each other:

Since our way of seeing things is literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings, and thence common activities and purposes; the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to tensions and achievements of growth and change. (Williams 1961, 55)

I agree with Stuart Hall, who interpreted Williams' conceptualisation of culture as 'threaded through all social practices' and 'the sum of their inter-relationship' (Hall 1986, 36). I treat all my cases as equally important and study the relations between them, articulated in the discourses produced, because I see the relations between them as a key to mental 'structures of feeling' that are created collectively. In doing so I am attempting to 'discover the nature of organisation which is the complex of these relationships' (Williams 1961, 61). In other words, I am looking at 'patterns of a characteristic kind' and interactions and relations between these patterns that are lived and experienced as a whole at a particular moment of time (Williams 1961, 63). The understanding of culture as a totality of experiences whose 'complexity is constituted by the fluidity with which practices move into and out of one another' explains the choice of empirical cases for this study – theatre, restaurant, fashion, television and internet – as well as the first research question, which focuses on the different representations of the Soviet past in various cultural platforms, and the third research question, which asks what types

of nostalgia can be found during the period under study (Hall 1986, 44). In other words: in raising these two questions I am inquiring into the practices and patterns to which Williams refers. I am trying to see whether any decisive change in this 'whole way of life' occurred in the 1990s and 2000s. The theoretical perspective on culture as social practice and a 'whole way of life' corresponds to the methodological approach in which thick descriptions of the selected case studies are combined with interviews with producers and the reactions of journalist critics.

4. Material Nostalgia

Space is essential in the processes of remembering and constructing identities. People need to pay tribute at the tombs of their ancestors to remember who they are. Memorials are created to mourn fallen soldiers and to commemorate war heroes. Museums are built to narrate national histories and preserve valuable cultural heritage. Governments sanction the construction of monuments and obelisks to shape national identity and encourage patriotic feelings, securing the citizens' loyalty to the state. Individuals voluntarily engage in investigative activities to find where their relatives and/or compatriots are buried, and then erect monuments in their honour, establishing links between generations. All of these actions are necessary for the memory work and consequently for the crystallisation of identities.

With the collapse of communism in Europe, a substantial layer of culture was consigned to oblivion. The copious research on the phenomenon of German *Ostalgie* has shown that capitalist 'triumphalism' followed the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the united Germany, easterners rejected Eastern brands while embracing products manufactured in the West: 'eastern products had also disappeared, nearly overnight, from the store shelves as West German distributors assumed control of the East German market' (Berdahl 2010, 50). Meanwhile, western Germans collected 'clumsy' East German products that embodied the failure of socialist industry. They saw eastern Germans as ignorant for being seduced by the fancy packaging of western goods and gradually started to find aesthetic value in the inept-seeming eastern products (Berdahl 2010, 50). Shortly after the fall of the Wall, Berlin became a city where one could go to a Stasi-themed bar and enjoy 'traditional' eastern culinary masterpieces. In 2006, a new museum opened in the centre of Berlin – the *DDR-Museum*, where visitors (not only from the West) were promised an interactive 'first-hand experience' of life in East Germany. It was a privately owned museum which soon not only became one of the most visited museums in Europe but also was nominated for the European Museum of the Year Award. The museum spatialised the history of East Germany and made it a commercially successful enterprise.

In Russia was not long before the first nostalgic theme restaurants were opened. However, it took a bit longer for the first USSR museum to be established. In this chapter I will present an analysis of the conservation of the material culture of the Soviet period in the 1990s and 2000s up to 2012, focusing on restaurant culture in the mid-1990s and the USSR museums that opened in the late 2000s. I consider these spaces to be important *lieux de mémoire* where collective memory was produced through material objects and a specific atmospheric environment. These examples will illustrate how the nostalgic economy developed in the 1990s in Russia, demonstrate some key topics in the Russian nostalgic discourse in that period, and initiate a discussion on identity. The chapter concludes with a short review of the project of a national museum of the USSR which is being planned in Ulyanovsk.

4.1. Culinary and Atmospheric Nostalgia in the Restaurant Petrovich

Red curtains, busts of Lenin, old-fashioned furniture, pioneer uniforms on waitresses and waiters, alongside *kotleta po-kievsky* ('Kyiv style meat balls'), Russian salad and eggs with mayonnaise, comprise a cocktail of Soviet restaurant kitsch that appeared in the 1990s and 2000s. Many of these establishments have folded long ago, while others still exist, and new ones have recently opened while this dissertation was being written. The Soviet theme is evidently not yet exhausted and continues bringing profits to those who manage to sell it to customers. In 2001, the journalist Ekaterina Drankina wrote an article in the magazine *So-obshchenie* describing and praising a restaurant/club in Moscow called Petrovich, which soon after its opening in 1997 had become well known and popular for its concept of 'nostalgic' cuisine and design and friendly atmosphere (Drankina 2001).

Food plays an important role in stimulating of the process of remembering. Petrovich was one of the first (if not the very first) *theme* restaurants in post-Soviet Russia. Right after Petrovich was opened and became popular, similar places started to pop up in many Russian towns and cities, serving dishes familiar to everyone born and raised in the Soviet Union under ironic titles: *Zavety Il'icha* ('Lenin's Covenants') soup; *Bei Burzhuev!* ('Kill the bourgeoisie!') pork chops; *Net Rasizmu!* ('No to racism!') pancakes with black caviar. What is peculiar is that one does not

have to go to one of these theme restaurants to satisfy one's hunger, curiosity or nostalgia for this food. It can still be had at old-fashioned provincial restaurants and university dining halls. Nevertheless, nostalgic restaurants are popular, and they are popular not only in Russia, but across the whole of the former Soviet Union and its neighbouring 'friendly countries'. The reason why they are so popular may lie in their capacity 'to evoke bodily responses in different sensory registers: sight, taste, touch, and sound' (Caldwell 2006, 100). The fact is that food functions as a mnemonic device which 'facilitates the transmission of different cultural realities across space and time' (Caldwell 2006, 100).

In order better to understand exactly what happens in Petrovich, one may turn to Marcel Proust's episode of the madeleine in the first volume of *In Search of Lost Time* (1913/2013). Proust wrote about voluntary and involuntary memories: a voluntary memory can be called up or repeated at will, while an involuntary memory may surface unexpectedly but cannot be recalled deliberately without considerable effort. An involuntary memory grasps the past in its entirety, reviving not only an image from the past but also related sensations and emotions (Whitehead 2009, 104). For Proust, memory is profoundly physical and a bodily sensation acts as the catalyst of involuntary memory. 'The richest route into recollection is through the body memory' (Casey 1987, 171). By going to a restaurant, one invites physical experiences and hence physical memories. The physical memory lasts a few seconds, but then it stimulates a stream of memories. It is a kind of 'prelude to the more sustained act of remembering' (Whitehead 2009, 106). Eating familiar food in an environment with familiar objects functions as a stimulus for other memories an individual might have. An individual starts to recollect personal memories which are connected to this or that particular dish. This is what Petrovich is about. 'Proust makes clear that this habitual aspect of body memory is essential in allowing us to domesticate an initially unfamiliar space, and to feel at home there' (Whitehead 2009, 105). Hence the experience of eating makes one feel at home more quickly, makes one feel that the longing for home is satisfied.

The food at Petrovich, with all its sensory effects of taste and smell, is said to be prepared using traditional recipes (however, not everything on the menu is made strictly according to the famous Soviet cookery book *The Book of Tasty and Healthy Food* ('Kniga o vkusnoi i zdorovoi pishche'), and evokes, if not nostalgia, then at least tradition. However,

this culinary tradition has nothing to do with the food served at Soviet diners.¹ The dishes have comical ‘communist’ names which are made-up constructions of the present day, while their taste is actually much better than the originals, at least as I remember them. The food recalls a memory of home-made meals, the homely warmth of the hearth and communication in the kitchen, rather than the poorly prepared and served food of Soviet cafeterias. What Petrovich creates is a feeling of home. Such a strategy may have both cultural and commercial value: in the first place, it is directed at conserving memories, passing them down from one generation to another; in the second, it is aimed at creating an emotional bond with customers to make them return to the restaurant. A memory is located in the mind of the individual, and is reawakened when the individual is faced with an object while moving through a space (van Dijck 2007). By locating familiar objects and offering familiar food, the owners of Petrovich have minimised the part played by chance: the objects invoke memories in an individual and call forth other associated memories. On recognising the space and associating positive emotions with it, customers will want to come back to the place again.

4.1.1. The Petrovichs

Collectivity not only evolves around events or shared experiences; it can also advance from objects or environments – anything from buildings to landscapes – through which people feel connected spatially. (van Dijck 2007, 10)

Initially, the idea of such a restaurant did not seem to be commercially viable, and the founders only hoped to recover their investment.² The idea of opening such a restaurant first came up in 1993, and it took four years for the owners to realise this project. It was a collective action in which a whole community of friends was engaged: everyone had to do something, to invest a little money, to help a little.³

In 1997, when the restaurant finally opened its doors, newly rich Russians felt bewildered and confused to find that a place so poorly decorated (some thought the owners did not have enough money to buy

¹ On nostalgia for Soviet food, see e.g. Kushkova (2009), Sokolova (2001), Chuprin (2001).

² See restaurant’s website, http://www.club-petrovich.ru/rus/about/history_bilgo/.

³ Ibid.

new, 'good' furniture and put tablecloths on the tables) could attract so much attention in the press and among Moscow's sophisticated public. Indeed, in this place no two chairs are alike: they are all different and seem to have been collected from old country houses and apartments. Furthermore, one can examine photos of Brezhnev and Gagarin on the walls, ancient radio sets, an accordion, piles of magazines, a black-and-white television set, an odd-looking phone, numerous signs, and old photos and documents. Visitors can take from a bookshelf the Proceedings of the XXII Congress of the Communist Party or *Ogoniok* magazine, one of the most widely read magazines in Soviet Russia, and read them for pleasure; board games are available as well. The interior is alive with caricatures, musical instruments, sewing machines, clothes on hangers, and furniture of that cherished time – all the objects dear to the Soviet person. The restaurant's interior became a kind of filter that determined its clientele: most 'new Russians' did not bother to enter because the Petrovich simply was 'not cool enough' for them. 'Ordinary people' were not even interested. And those who were interested became identified as a certain pool of people, a community of practice, 'the Petrovichs'.

The artist, caricaturist and essayist Andrei Bil'zho, the conceptual manager of the restaurant, recalls that he wanted to create some sort of space *in the name of* his cartoon character Petrovich.⁴ 'Petrovich' was a cartoon drawn by Bil'zho exclusively for the Kommersant publishing house. The cartoons narrated everyday encounters of its main character, a man called Petrovich (Bil'zho 2007).⁵ According to Bil'zho, 'Petrovich is our average soul'.⁶ In other words, Petrovich was a collective image of *Homo sovieticus*, a typical Soviet person who possessed a whole range of characteristics (Zinoviev 1981; Levada 2000, 2001; 2002; 2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2005; Gudkov 2007; Bil'zho 2007). The term *Homo sovieticus* was introduced by the philosopher Aleksander Zinoviev in 1982 (Zinoviev 1982/2000). It was subsequently used by the Russian sociologist Yuri Levada, who defined by it a complex and multidimensional set of qualities which can be seen in different social groups at different points in time. The Soviet person is characterised by a strong dualism between the individual and the state. First and foremost, the *Soviet person* thinks of himself or herself as a subordinate subject in relation to the state, on which he or

⁴ See Bil'zho's autobiographical sketch at <http://www.snob.ru/profile/5135>.

⁵ The Kommersant publishing house was founded in the 1990s in Moscow.

⁶ See http://www.club-petrovich.ru/rus/about/history_bilgo/.

she depends and with which he or she at the same time is constantly dissatisfied. Second, the Soviet person sees the world as hierarchical, understands who is at the top and who is at the bottom of the structure, and is worried about having no place among the bosses. Meanwhile, the Soviet person tries to find ways to show off and wield power. Third, the Soviet person has a capacity to adapt to any conditions, to survive, to shield himself or herself. And finally, the Soviet person divides people into different circles: a circle of friends and family, a circle of neighbours, and everyone else. The inner circle is the most important because in this circle one can feel confidence and safety, while in the outermost circle a person has no influence and everything depends on external forces (Dubin 2013).

At the same time, the character Petrovich can also be seen as a generic image of a generation born in the late 1950s and early '60s, in other words, the 'last Soviet generation'. The period between the late 1950s and the 1980s is often referred to as the 'late socialist period', and can be divided into two smaller periods: the thaw (*ottepel'*), the period of Khrushchev's reforms, and the stagnation (*zastoi*) period under Brezhnev, with the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968 as a symbolic dividing line between the two (Yurchak 2006, 31). According to the Russian anthropologist Alexei Yurchak, 'these two periods roughly correspond to two generations – the older generation that is sometimes called the *sixtiers* (*shestidesiatniki*, identified by the name of their formative decade) and the younger group, here called the "last Soviet generation"'.⁷ He claims that the people who came of age during the 1970s and mid-80s shared the same 'understandings, meanings, and processes of that period', despite their social, gender, educational and professional differences, and differences of ethnicity and language, which in turn led to 'differences in the experiences of socialism by these people'. Essentially, the identity of the last Soviet generation was formed by a shared experience of the authoritative discourse of the stagnation period (Yurchak 2006, 32). According to Yurchak, the complexity of the Soviet identity is hidden in the fact that the majority of the population 'collectively participate[d] in the production and reception of authoritative texts and rituals', while at the same time they were actively engaged in the creation of various 'identities and form of living that were enabled by authoritative discourse, but not

⁷ He defined these last Soviet generations as 'people who were born between the 1950s and the early 1970 and came of age between the 1970s and the mid-1980s' (Yurchak 2006: 31).

necessarily defined by it' (Yurchak 2006, 32). He argues that this 'complex relationship [...] allowed them to maintain an affinity for the many aesthetic possibilities and ethical values of socialism, while at the same time interpreting them in new terms that were not necessarily anticipated by the state – thus avoiding many of the system's imitations and forms of control' (Yurchak 2006, 32). Their strategy of living in the USSR can best be conceived as a strategy of living *vne* ('out', 'outside', 'beyond' etc.), that is, in a particular relation to the system in which one lived within its limits but remained relatively invisible. In introducing this strategy, Yurchak insists on shifting away from the often presupposed 'pro/anti dichotomy in relation to authoritative discourse', as the actions of many Soviet citizens did not fit this binary oppositional structure. Instead, he suggests paying attention to practices that were not explicitly involved with authoritative discourse, which people considered uninteresting and irrelevant. People replaced 'Soviet political and social concerns with a quite different set of concerns that allowed one to lead a creative and imaginative life' (Yurchak 2006, 132).⁸

The identity of the 'last Soviet generation' was formed around shared experiences which were produced but not necessarily defined by the structures and discourses of the authoritarian Soviet state: the 'everyday reality of "normal life" (*normal'naia zhizn'*) was not necessarily equivalent to "the state" or "ideology"; indeed, living socialism to them often meant something quite different from the official interpretations provided by state rhetoric' (Yurchak 2006, 8). The adaptation of this perspective in the lives of average Soviet citizens to some extent helps to explain today's phenomenon of post-Soviet nostalgia and the prevalence of the corresponding representations of the everyday life in the television programmes about the Soviet Union:

⁸ The more extreme examples of living *vne* 'are sometimes described as internal emigration [*vnutrenniia emigratsia*]' (Yurchak 2006: 132). In Yurchak's words, '[U]nlike emigration, internal emigration captures precisely the state of being inside and outside at the same time, the inherent ambivalence of this oscillating position [...]. The metaphor of internal emigration may apply less to other, less extreme but still related examples of this lifestyle, when one is actually quite involved in many activities of the system, but nevertheless remains partial to many of its connotative meanings [...]. In these more widespread cases the metaphor of internal emigration perhaps might be adapted to refer to certain dispositions and relations – for example, as emigration from the constative dimension of authoritative discourse, but not from all meanings and realities of socialist life' (Yurchak 2006: 132–133).

An undeniable constitutive part of today's phenomenon of 'post Soviet nostalgia', which is a complex post-Soviet construct, is the longing for the very real humane values, ethics, friendships, and creative possibilities that the reality of socialism afforded – often in spite of the state's proclaimed goals – and that were as irreducibly part of the everyday life of socialism as were the feelings of dullness and alienation. (Yurchak 2006, 8)

This longing for strengthening communication among friends and the need to re-establish networks of friendship was one of the reasons behind the establishment of Petrovich:

A sufficiently large group of people meet regularly to discuss the fact that the vast community of consultants, humourists, journalists, and people who were professionally engaged in media and communication had no place of 'their own' to meet. Previously, everybody had gathered at the Ekipazh, but eventually it began to change, and then was actually closed for some reason. Nevertheless, everyone in the group realised that 'we must meet more often,' and in fact it was at the Ekipazh that the idea of creating a new club was conceived. (<http://www.club-petrovich.ru/>)

The Petrovich was meant to be a space where old friends could meet in a familiar atmosphere. In the 1990s, people who used to meet in private kitchens during the Soviet period had a need for a space where a similar kind of vernacular communication could be continued. The lack of a cosy, familiar environment where people could satisfy their longing for communicative practices brought the phenomenon of Petrovich into life. To a certain extent, what was wanted was not only a space to meet, since one could meet in any pub or restaurant, but a space that could serve both as a substitute for the cosy environment of a lost home and as a space where only an exclusive group of people enjoyed each other's company. The founders of the restaurant successfully achieved this sense of familiarity and comfort through familiar objects from the shared past.

Because the space was intended for meetings among a specific group, everyone who wanted to join the club had to 'become a Petrovich'. The club was exclusive and only confirmed members were allowed to enter. In a way, the addition of the patronymic Petrovich (or Petrovna) to the individual name of every member of the club confirms their belonging to a group of people with similar, identifiable backgrounds, who were born

and grew up in the USSR. One can also become a Petrovich in absentia: the sculptural pantheon of famous Petrovichs includes Vladimir Petrovich Maiakovski, Yuri Petrovich Gagarin, and other persons who for obvious reasons never had the opportunity to visit the club in person. By joining the club a person would thus become, to use Benedict Anderson's term, a member of an even larger 'imagined community' and acquire a distinct cultural identity which not only embraced the Soviet period, but had deep cultural and historical roots (Anderson 1991).

4.1.2. Petrovich's Shoebox

Such a focus on everyday experience and individual perceptions of political and socio-economic development coincides with what Piotr Sztompka has called a paradigm shift towards 'the third sociology': that is, a shift in theory and methodology towards a greater focus on trivial events of day-to-day life seen within the context of the collective, determined and restricted both by the agency of the participants and by the structure and cultural setting of the environment (Sztompka 2009). A parallel can be found in studies of history: the Annales School similarly broke with traditional historiography by shifting the focus from grand narratives and political developments to research on microhistories using sociological methods.

The focus on everyday life experiences includes the material tokens that symbolise this side of life. Kitchenware, furniture and fashion all constituted material signifiers of everyday life. After the fall of the Soviet Union, when Russian markets were flooded with 'modern' Western objects which, for many people, represented a new, modern life, it suddenly became dull to possess and to use things inherited from the Soviet Union, and people who did so were considered old-fashioned. The whole country went through a 'modernising' period in which apartments and institutions were renovated to European (read: modern) standards (such renovations were called *evroremont*, 'Euro-renovation'). At that time, the unpopular, unfashionable and unmodern Soviet past was consigned to the rubbish heap, while newness (present and future) was seen as a move towards the West, not only in terms of consumer culture, but also in a socio-economic and a political sense. It was popular to speak of a 'transition period' of the Eastern-bloc countries, including Russia (Cox 1998; Carothers 2002; Diamond 2002). While the 'transition period' in a political sense implied a change from an authoritarian (Soviet,

Eastern) political model to a democratic (Western) model, throwing away the material objects inherited from the communist regime and rapidly substituting Western products (fashion brands, cars, electronic devices, wallpaper, toilets etc.) symbolised this change.

Andrei Bil'zho recalls that the idea of opening a restaurant or club was born in 1993 (Bil'zho 2011). During the time when the Soviet past was actively being disposed of, Bil'zho passionately engaged in collecting the things 'removed from their ordinary use'.⁹ And the reason why Bil'zho started to collect objects of the Soviet material culture was, as he explains, because this Soviet materiality began to disappear from the day-to-day world: 'Even the ordinary thick, faceted glasses were hard to find!' (Bil'zho 2011). He believed, however, that it was important to safeguard the material culture of the Soviet period because it symbolised both the historical period and individual life stories. His collection became a kind of unofficial museum dedicated to everyday life in the Soviet Union, and the objects in it triggered memories and positive emotions about the past:

People see an old radio receiver just like the one their grandmother used to have, an old pack of Soyuz-Apollo cigarettes, and understand that we are partially constituted by these old items and memories of them. Here, people good-naturedly laugh at the kitsch and propaganda of that time – this is an irony in the spirit of the Soviet intelligentsia's kitchens, often the only place where you could freely express your thoughts. (Andrei Bil'zho, 2011)

Petrovich functions as a kind of 'shoebox', a space where people collect material objects as mementos (van Dijck 2007). In a shoebox, memories are mediated through material objects that help people to make sense of their lives and to create connections between the past, present and future. 'These items mediate not only the remembrances of things past; they also mediate relationships between individuals and groups'; they 'reflect the shaping of an individual in a historical time frame' and 'raise interesting questions about a person's identity in a specific culture at a certain moment of time' (van Dijck 2007, 1). But unlike the shoeboxes most people have, the shoebox of Petrovich represents the shared and collective

⁹ I use Belk's definition of collecting as 'the process of actively, selectively and passionately acquiring and possessing things removed from ordinary use and perceived as part of a set of non-identical objects or experiences' (quoted in Tilley et al. 2006, 535).

memories of several generations of Soviet people. By collecting these different mediated memories, Bil'zho tried to make sense of the inner worlds of the people living in the USSR through everyday utensils, and created in Petrovich a sense of continuity between different individuals and the collective.

Just as in a shoebox, memories are organised at Petrovich according to 'actual or perceived participation in a (temporal) collectivity' and are ordered by their associations rather than chronologically (van Dijck 2007, 9). The past here adheres to a kind of associative logic which works not by calendar years, but by objects: past time is visualised through material objects which connect the viewer with emotions linked to a certain period. Yet the objects collected at Petrovich defy linear, chronological arrangement and resist a facile, one-dimensional evaluation of the past. Their presence enacts and evokes different times simultaneously, forcing the visitor to conceive time as a coexistence rather than a succession of epochs: the Soviet past exists in this spatial setting synchronously. At Petrovich, the temporal perspective is inverted; the visitor looks through a keyhole into a series of pasts which all exist simultaneously in all their complexity. Visible on the surface is the 'imprint' of all these various pasts in the form of the individual and group identities of those who are present in the space. The objects collected construct how Soviet life is remembered, or could be remembered: personal toys, consumer products, official statements and newspapers coexisted in one and the same place, expressing the interplay of the individual and communal spheres of life, the mixture of private and public identities – everything was there and life was possible, against all odds.

The shoebox of Petrovich became a space that gave shelter both to unwanted fragments of personal lives and to material objects that still had a value for their owners but for some reason could no longer be kept. Some of these objects, symbolising an unwanted past, ended up on rubbish heaps or in the stalls of the flea markets, where the restaurant owners rediscovered them and placed them in the restaurant. Other objects were brought by their owners directly to the restaurant. There was no space for them in the new life, but their owners believed that they contributed to the shared cultural heritage of the Soviet period. They were *personal cultural memories*, 'the acts and products of remembering in which individuals engage to make sense of their lives in relation to the lives of others and to their surroundings, situating themselves in time and

place' (van Dijck 2007, 6). The creation of the restaurant is a good example of the 'recursive nature of individual and collective memory, one always inhabiting the other' (van Dijck 2007, 9). However, this is not the only process that can be observed at Petrovich. By placing discarded symbols of Soviet material culture in his restaurant, Bil'zho simultaneously transformed them into both aesthetic and commercial products. By putting an old teapot in the restaurant, Bil'zho invested it with different meanings: the old teapot was no longer a functional, but an aesthetic and commercial object. Soviet everyday objects become objects of consumption (in this case, as elements of the aestheticised atmosphere of the restaurant Petrovich, which is the commodity being consumed), losing their utilitarian functions and turning into *signs*, possibly metaphors signifying the Soviet universe. Thus at Petrovich, a transformation of value took place from utilitarian to aesthetic. Bil'zho initiated the process of transformation and got many other people involved, making the process a collective one in which people actively contributed to the creation of an unofficial museum and the creation of aesthetic value in objects originally designed for other purposes.

Bearing in mind that the selection of products in the Soviet era was limited (Kushkova, 2009), the probability was great that a restaurant visitor might suddenly see an object that would remind him or her of a moment in the past. These signs therefore had a great potential to function as a stimuli that could stir nostalgic emotions. In this case, the experience of visiting a theme restaurant could be seen as one of consuming nostalgia for the Soviet past, so that the Soviet past becomes an object of consumption. When many restaurants after Petrovich began to exploit the same theme, the constant repetition of similar signs led to the erosion of real relations between people and these objects. In the very beginning, such places were 'unofficial museums' of the everyday life of the USSR whose owners tried to recreate the atmosphere and conserve the memory of that past life, but with time, consumer relations towards the past took over, and these restaurants (including Petrovich) became part of a nostalgia industry in which nostalgia was used to create strong emotional bonds with consumers.

The example of the restaurant Petrovich reveals several important tendencies in attitudes towards the Soviet past. During the period when Western goods were valued higher than locally produced ones, the material culture of the late Soviet period was revisited. The revaluation of everyday objects corresponded with the opening of an 'unofficial

museum' of late Soviet culture in which various individual memories and histories from different decades were available at the same time. The institution was both all-inclusive and exclusive: it unified unofficial stories materialised in objects, but united only those people who felt similarly about the Soviet past. It created an identity that contrasted with that of the 'new Russians', the class of nouveaux riches that emerged in the 1990s.

The Petrovich shows how temporal nostalgia becomes spatialised. The longing for various moments in the past materialises in objects which serve as souvenirs, reminding people of those moments. The inability to bring back time, to go back to the past, creates an impulse to reinstall the past in present time. The simulated reinstallation of a past period turns into a collection of objects in a particular space – here not a museum, but a restaurant. The fact that the place is a restaurant is not arbitrary. An official museum, as an institutionalised space usually regulated by the state and with its own internal rules of collecting, archiving and exhibiting, was not yet available for such popular memories. Only a private initiative and a space without strict regulations could become a house for these materialised personal memories and nostalgias. Yet even this collection does not *satisfy* nostalgia, but only perpetuates it: it 'postpones the homecoming'. One has to return many more times to experience again the bittersweet memories stimulated by the experience of the restaurant.

As I have mentioned, the Petrovich was not the only example of culinary nostalgia. In fact, in the 2000s the theme of Soviet nostalgia became a regular trend among restaurants, continuing into the present decade. However, something has changed since the 1990s. First of all, the Petrovich itself has changed: the old customers no longer come by; younger people have invaded the space, and it gradually lost the ambience it had in the beginning. Meanwhile places such as Dachniki and Kwartirka opened right on Nevski Prospect in St. Petersburg, the main avenue of the city, where they cater for both Russian and international tourists. In time they lost their appeal and began to be associated with bad taste and kitsch. The Petrovich continued to prosper, however, and Bil'zho has opened Petrovich branches in St. Petersburg, Kiev and even Prague.

The Petrovich began a trend of spatialising nostalgic longing which soon took on new forms in new media. It produced a specific structure for remembering which was later adopted by others. As early as the 1990s, Russian people were able to observe how memories of the Soviet past

penetrated the theatre stages and invaded television channels. In these plays and programmes, and especially in the way in which productions were organised, one can find echoes of the structure that originated at Petrovich: the associative logic and positive memories of everyday life, presented in a slightly ironic manner. Before I go on to investigate this process in the chapters that follow, I would like to extend the present examination of practices of preservation of Soviet material culture briefly reviewing the attempts to establish a museum of the USSR. These attempts illustrate how attitudes towards the Soviet past began to change, becoming more conservative and increasingly resisting differentiated readings of that past.

4.2. Material Memory: the USSR Museums

4.2.1. Private Museums of the USSR

In present time, everything becomes heritage and is subject to museification (Hartog 2003, 196–97). In regard to the restaurant Petrovich, I have shown how the private initiative of an artist willing to collect mediated individual memories in order to construct the atmosphere of a lost home became a successful cultural and business enterprise at a time when the Soviet cultural heritage was being relegated to oblivion. When Russia set about to reconfigure its national and cultural identity, turning to the past to rediscover national and cultural roots became an important task (Beumers, 2012; Strukov, 2009). After East Germany's example, the next step after the theme restaurants would be to open a museum of the USSR.

National museums of cultural history play a key role in the creation of identities and in promoting what Carol Duncan has called 'rituals of citizenship': while establishing evidence of a state's commitment to the well-being of the people, such museums at the same time stimulate a sense of belonging to the nation-state (Duncan 1991, 88). Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner have argued that a nation is an imagined realm assembled from carefully selected components and grounded in an idea of belonging defined by territory, language, ethnicity and religion (Anderson 1991; Gellner 1983). To these constitutive elements Manuel Castells later added the shared experience of a shared past which is diversified socially, territorially, ethnically and by gender but still common to the people living in the same nation-state (Castells 1997/1998, 29–30). The shared past is formed of collective memories – and these are

contradictory interpretations of the past by competing interest groups rather than one unified collective memory. Ideally, these competing memories should confront grand narratives, and new versions of the shared past should become official and replace old grand narratives. However, sometimes old narratives are so persistently inherited that the change to a new historical paradigm is impossible, and what has been silenced remains silenced.

In 2013, the journalist Sergey Gogin wrote: ‘The idea of a museum of the USSR is very attractive because more than half of the country’s population remembers the Soviet era, many experience nostalgia, and those who never lived in the Soviet Union want to know how it was’ (Gogin 2013). Indeed, there was a need for clarification, for the deconstruction of myths and for coming to terms with controversial periods of the Soviet past, which apparently did not happen during the 1990s.¹⁰ In the late 2000s, initiatives to portray everyday life in the USSR were coming from below and materialised in the creation of three private museums: in Moscow, in Novosibirsk and in Kazan. All three museums have some features in common, yet they are also very different from each other and represent three different approaches to the Soviet past.

The museum in Kazan, *Musej Sotsialisticheskogo byta*, can best be described as a museum of socialist everyday life. The exposition is structured thematically: toys, beauty, money, school, rock music etc. Initially it was an ‘underground museum’ in a cellar, where its owner – the photographer Rustem Valiakhmetov – collected objects of Soviet design. The story of this museum reiterates the history of the Petrovich restaurant: its founder Valiakhmetov also collected discarded objects the Soviet era, and like the collection at Petrovich, Valiakhmetov’s grew with the help of its visitors. The celebrity factor also played an important role as Russian rock stars contributed objects to the museum, making it more attractive to the public. The idea behind the establishment of this museum was to retrieve positive memories and emotions about the past by focusing on everyday life, and to interest younger generations in the culture of their parents and grandparents. This is how the museum promotes itself:

The Soviet Lifestyle Museum is a unique place where everyone travels to the recent but already forgotten 1970s and 1980s. Real exhibits

¹⁰ For a discussion of this topic, see Baunov and Zubov (2014).

make it easy to understand how, until quite recently, this great multinational country bearing the proud name of the USSR lived. The exhibits recreate the spirit of that time, while the rest is up to the mood of the visitors. It's a world of positive emotions and positive ambience. We invite everyone to take a tour of the bright past and wish you a wonderful future! (<http://muzeisb.ru/>)

Here the past is presented as a fun and unconditionally positive place, one that is pleasant to revisit. It is mostly the past of childhood and youth that is recreated, with toys, games, school and pioneer uniforms, as well as fun and rebellious music subcultures. The main focus is on the last decade of the USSR, the epoch of stagnation, which a generation born in the 1970s and 1980s might remember. Even the promotional video for the museum features two twenty-something men telling prospective visitors in a very informal way what they might find interesting in this engaging museum.

The aim of this museum is thus to produce an emotional response or affect in the visitors. Linda Hutcheon has argued that nostalgia is always affective as it produces emotional responses in people. The museum of the USSR and the restaurant Petrovich both are instances of what I call an *affective nostalgic economy*, combining Linda Hutcheon's theoretical with those of Henry Jenkins (2006). In marketing theory, an affective economy is based on the use of emotions to engage people and influence the consumption of a new product, that is, an attempt to create a deeper, more emotional connection between the consumer and the product (Jenkins 2006). The strategy of creating in consumers the emotional commitment to a brand that is necessary to motivate their purchasing decisions requires marketing teams to tailor products to attract more potential consumers and secure their loyalty. In the cases under study here, by allowing the public to participate in the creation of the product (the restaurant or the museum), the owner strives to secure customers and hence potential profits. That also implies that the public is an active agent in the creation of the cultural assets – in this case, collective memories and nostalgia.

In fact, the museum and restaurant owners did not have any other way of acquiring items for their interior design and exhibits than rummaging through flea markets or searching the apartments and summer houses of their friends. An important consequence of this necessity is that the public became more engaged in the processes of re-evaluating the past and creating (or recreating) the brand 'USSR'. One might see these enterprises as early examples of *crowdsourcing*, a term usually applied to processes in

which corporations exploit innovation in common and ‘solicit design ideas from their consumers, using their online community to weight their attractiveness, and sharing revenue with the amateur creators whose products the companies produce and distribute’ (Jenkins 2008). The owners of the restaurant and the museum crowdsourced the material and non-material cultural assets they needed – the objects and stories – to create profit-generating enterprises. At the time both these initiatives started, however, it was not apparent to either the museum owner or the restaurant owners that they would ever recoup the money they invested. Both projects were started as hobbies with the idea of conserving material artefacts of the epoch, and with no expectation of gaining recognition – at least according to the founders themselves.

In the late 2000s, the city government became interested in the initiative and helped to find a suitable space for the museum. That moment became an important milestone in the museum’s history, for it meant the state recognised the need for a USSR museum. The museum is now located, symbolically enough, in a former communal apartment, where it covers 200 square metres and offers permanent and temporary exhibitions.

The museum of the USSR in Moscow, opened in December 2010 by the Arkhangelsk businessman and former politician Alexander Donskoi, is a good illustration of a clear business initiative. Donskoi stated in an interview that he identified nostalgia for the Soviet past as one of the main tendencies present in Russian society today. While planning the project, Donskoi monitored people’s preferences and interests to find out what would interest them the most. This work had begun while he was still active in politics: ‘Due to the fact that I was doing politics, I was interested in what people watch on TV. They watch films about the past’ (Donskoi 2013). Donskoi says he had a ‘feeling’ that there was a very strong interest in the Soviet past. He cannot explain why there is such an interest among the general public, but he notices an important pattern in how that interest is inflamed and organised. He emphasises the role of the mass media in escalating attention to the Soviet theme. As he says, when the museum had just opened and was not yet successful, journalists from the news programme *Vesti* aired a story about it which led to a rapid increase in visitors and, consequently, profits. The media’s interest did not stop there: another channel, whose profile is not news but music and entertainment, also ran a story on the museum project. After an article was

published in the newspaper *Moscow News*, travel agencies contacted the museum suggesting cooperation, and the museum received still more visitors.

Donskoi saw another important reason for such interest in the Soviet theme in the fact that ‘the USSR is still alive’: that is, people still think in the conceptual frames of the Soviet mentality. This idea is symbolically expressed in a figure of Vladimir Lenin which ‘sleeps’ in one of the museum rooms. The wax figure of Lenin, with its chest rhythmically rising and falling, illustrates the phrase popular in the Soviet Union, ‘Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live!’ According to Donskoi, the figure of Lenin, more a joke than a serious installation, visually represents the current state of relations between the past and present of Russia: his feeling that the Soviet past is present in everyday reality is supported by the persisting ideological structure and by the presence of the same persons in contemporary circles of political power who were active during Soviet rule and have been smoothly integrated in the new Russia. ‘While the new governments in Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic introduced lustration, which regulated the participation of former communists in the governments, it was not done in Russia’ (Donskoi 2013). The political and ideological structures remained the same, he concludes, and so it is not at all surprising that there are restorative tendencies in Russian politics and ideology.

Motivated by profits, Donskoi chose the location for the future museum very carefully, and he points out that he did not need to invest much. He had a choice of two locations: one was on the Arbat, one of the most central and most frequented streets in Moscow, usually full of tourists; the other one was on the grounds of the All-Russia Exhibition Centre (VDNKh), which was built in the Soviet era as a tribute to the achievements of the Soviet economy. Donskoi opted for the latter because it is a ‘Soviet space’, and because the rent was only half that in the city centre. Following a similar strategy of crowdsourcing material artefacts, he relied on private donors, people who heard about the museum and wanted to contribute. This strategy certainly kept the owner’s expenses low, yet even although his investment was minimal, Donskoi stresses that the project was rather unsuccessful in the beginning. Nevertheless, he believed that it would soon become a successful business because interest in the Soviet past is strong, and in fact business has grown steadily, thanks to the mass media (Donskoi 2013).

Remarkably, after the museum opened, the head of the Department of Culture of the City of Moscow, Sergey Kapkov, announced that there was a need for a USSR museum in Moscow, which should definitely be located at VDNKh, where in fact Donskoi's private museum of the USSR already existed. In 2014, the museum was closed.¹¹ Apparently, political forces want to seize the initiative and institutionalise the representation of the Soviet past under the authority of the state. Such an interest in the private initiative of the USSR museum on the part of the Russian state should hardly be seen as a coincidence. National Museums have been used by nation-states for purposes of self-representation and to establish legitimating links between the present government and the historical past. In so doing, nation-states define themselves, especially in the accelerating, globalised world and in face of the expanding European Union. At the same time they establish dichotomies of self and other that are important for identity formation. While the exoticised other was often geographically remote, as the Orient in museums of colonial history for example, in the private museums of the USSR it is the Soviet past that is presented as exotic and unique. In contrast to the official museums, however, which endeavour by means of carefully selected exhibits to create images of different historical periods through interpretation and explanation, these private museums' owners assume that the objects exhibited speak for themselves. The Moscow museum's management points out that Russian visitors often know more about the exhibits and stories behind them than the museum guides (who are usually young) (Donskoi 2013). The majority of museum guests have no questions about the collections, except those who are very young and have no direct experience of many of the exhibits, in which case it is usually their parents or grandparents who answer their questions. It is hardly surprising that some older visitors know about the exhibits: after all, they have first-hand experience and memories of the objects in questions.

The USSR museum in Novosibirsk, opened in 2009, was also founded with the aims of conserving the material world of the vanished USSR, establishing dialogue between the Soviet and post-Soviet generations, and fostering respect for the past. However, the museum also pursues ideological goals, which is probably why in one room, next to the collection of kitchenware, there is a collection of Soviet emblems, symbols of the Communist Party, and pamphlets about Marxism-Leninism. 'The

¹¹ See <http://www.colta.ru/news/1352>.

owner and director of the museum, Idea Lozhkina, is one of those who mourns the collapse of the Soviet Union, believes that Stalin's repressions were unavoidable and regrets that young people do not know who Lenin was' (Gogin 2013). The ideological and emotional ambiance of this museum is very different from those in Kazan and Moscow. The director of the museum seems to express political nostalgia and to favour restoring the old regime, representing one extreme of the broad spectrum of nostalgic sentiments in Russian society today. This extreme may not have been clearly visible until very recently, as it was previously overshadowed by the more reflective and commercial approaches to the past that dominated the Russian structure of feeling in the 1990s.

4.2.2. A National Project:

The Museum of the USSR in Ulyanovsk

Another USSR museum may open in 2022 in Ulyanovsk, the birthplace of Vladimir Lenin. Proposals for reconstructing an existing Lenin memorial there have been on the agenda since 2006 and reached their climax in 2012–2013. In 2013 it was decided to create a large museum complex, a sort of national tourism centre (Gogin 2013). The project includes a recreational section with a national park, a tourism section with a travel agency and hotels, an academic section with an Institute for the History of the USSR and an Institute of Soviet Architecture and Design, and many other sections.

The main architectural style of this new museum cluster will be Russian constructivism, which may seem paradoxical since that style was rejected in the beginning of the 1930s in favour of the Socialist Classical style. However, this is not the only paradox in the current proposal. For example, the convergence of Orthodox churches, reconstructions of medieval villages, Soviet memorials and a museum of the secret police NKVD under the title Museum of the USSR seems incongruous. Another paradox, or perhaps a wording mistake, is the Sots-Art museum (written Соц-Арт in Cyrillic script). Judging by the name, the museum should present postmodernist art, which emerged in Soviet Russia in the 1970s and stood ideologically in opposition to the state. What is peculiar is that

the PowerPoint slide presenting this museum is illustrated with paintings by Rodchenko from the 1920s.¹²

Building the complex is an expensive enterprise expected to cost 50 billion roubles. The initiative is being advanced by a local politician, Governor Sergey Morozov, and the writer Alexander Prokhanov, who wrote a letter to President Vladimir Putin trying to convince him of the importance of such a museum for the Russian national identity and of the need to reach a consensus about the Soviet past. Apparently this letter was noticed and the project has been approved at the federal level. The Izborsk Club, a gathering of experts with a conservative, nationalistic-patriotic background, has adopted an initiative to work on the conceptual development of the museum complex, which they see as a major basis of a Eurasian Renaissance (Gogin 2013). They believe that the museum complex can become a platform to unite Stalin's Bolshevik Russia with the Orthodox imperial Russia, a vision clearly reflected in the project proposal's paradoxical combination of sections.

Although the museum is still no more than a project, there is already a clear vision that it should become a centre for the patriotic education of young Russians, the centre of nostalgia for the empire, a place to reflect on the significance of the large-scale project known as the USSR, a major centre of tourism and entertainment generating large revenues for the city, and a museum with international fame (Gogin 2013). Some people see the museum as a promising start for a new branding strategy aimed at developing 'red tourism' – that is, tourism from countries that still profess communism or uphold the idea of the USSR, such as China and Vietnam (Gogin 2013). There are evident fears that the museum might serve the ideological goal of promoting and reformulating patriotic myths about the USSR rather than of presenting an objective picture of the past. The assistant director of the Lenin memorial museum in Ulyanovsk, Valery Perfilov, believes that the new USSR museum should be a museum of 'a great idea', presenting the USSR as the leader of the worldwide socialist system (Gogin 2012). Thus the very centre of the museum's conceptual

¹² The link <http://музей-cccp.рф/> where previously information about the project could be found is apparently broken. The museum's home page seems to be archived here: <http://archive.today/SDUZM> and I found the PowerPoint presentation here: <http://www.slideshare.net/rock4love/ss-22734351>. (Slide 75 is Sots-Art). Ulyanovsk city news internet portal informs that the project is postponed till 2017 because of the lack of federal financing. See <http://ulgrad.ru/?p=118131>.

base should be an optimistic, positive idea of the magnificence of the nation.

4.3. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have illustrated how material memories of the USSR were preserved in Russia from the 1990s to the 2010s. We have seen that the dominant structure of feeling during the whole period was concentrated in collective efforts to preserve material artefacts with the idea that they could stimulate a deeper and more structured way of remembering the past. Furthermore, the collective efforts were initiated and guided by private initiatives of people born and raised in the USSR. Interest, curiosity and sentimental longing evoked by the objects of material culture motivated efforts to create spaces where these memories could be collected. People of artistic professions were at the forefront of the collecting activities, which soon proved to be profitable. By the end of the 1990s and during the 2000s, restaurants with a Soviet theme, decorated with objects from second-hand stores, became a standard, demonstrating the commercial success of the idea.

The space of a restaurant with no fixed or institutionally regulated structure became an organic location for different memories and reflections about the Soviet past. I believe that in the 1990s it was difficult to imagine a more suitable space for the process of museification of the Soviet past to begin. Immediately after the fall of the Soviet Union, it was difficult to understand which way the political, social, economic and cultural development would turn. A political initiative to take control of the past had not yet been established. In the 1990s, restaurant owners decided what should be presented and how, and were not responsible to any higher authorities because they were not running museums, but restaurants.

A museum on the other hand is an institution which preserves and studies historical artefacts and presents them to the public. The main difference between a museum and a restaurant is that the former is an official institution. The creation of museums thus tends to lead to an institutionalisation of the memory of the Soviet past. In the late 2000s and early 2010s, private museums of the USSR emerged, using crowdsourcing as a strategy to obtain artefacts for their collections. Sometimes supported by local politicians, they nonetheless remain private initiatives and can hardly be considered as government agencies.

The projected national museum of the USSR is a different case. As an initiative of certain political actors that is supported at the federal level, this museum could become an example of the monopolisation of memory and the past in the hands of certain political forces, which claim authority for it and present it as the nation's idea. Such a museum would become the final full stop in the formation of opinion on the Soviet past, and mark the structure of feeling of a new period in which the state dictates new forms of nostalgia and remembering.

Looking back at the period of twenty years since 1990, there has been a process of unification of collective memories into a single, authorised version. The evident attempts of conservative political groups to take over the representations of the past create an alarming situation. Private, grass-roots activities of memory collection are becoming institutionalised and will soon become disciplined parts of an official memory. In this process, what the private initiatives intended to bring back from the shadows will be silenced by the authorities, who seem to prefer another history, one in which the perpetrators will become heroes again and the victims will be forgotten.





Top: Restaurant Petrovich, Restrooms. Photo: Anna Ivannikova

Bottom: A beer Napkin featuring Petrovich, the main character in artist Andrei Bil'zho caricatures. Photo: Anna Ivannikova



Top: The USSR Museum in Moscow, the exposition. Courtesy of Aleksander Dontskoi
Bottom: The USSR Museum in Moscow, the exposition. Courtesy of Aleksander Dontskoi

5. Dramatised Nostalgia

Having shown how nostalgia for the past was articulated through the creation of an ambiance or a themed environment, I will now continue with an examination of dramatised forms of nostalgia in the post-Soviet period. In this chapter I will focus mainly on what is considered one of the most influential media channels in the period from perestroika onwards: television (Zassoursky 1999; Vartanova 2011). Yet I will also include a short excursus to shed some light on the theatre of the same period in order to show how the same idea was realised differently in two different cultural forms, and how these two cultural forms came into a profound conflict with regard to the role of the media in the representation of the past.

I have divided this chapter into two sections: the first reviews three television shows broadcast in the 1990s and two theatre productions of the same period; the second analyses two documentaries and one television channel which were on the air in the 2000s. These two sections correspond to the changed tendencies in the structure of feeling during the twenty-year period under scrutiny, and thus illustrate the same deep fundamental transformations in Russian culture during the period of 1991–2012 that we have seen in the examples of the previous chapter. Before I proceed with the analysis of television examples, a few words about the medium of television and about Russian television in particular are in order.

The television production process involves multiple agents, among whom it is difficult to isolate an ‘author’. The boundaries of the television text are also difficult to define, whether by genre, programme, or time of broadcasting. Television has proved to have a high potential for use as a propaganda tool. The ‘easy accessibility of television technology makes for maximum penetration potential’ (Hutchings and Rulyova 2009, 3). The belief in the ‘objectivity of the camera’ further enhances the power of television: it is easier to validate a message ‘if it is grounded in the authenticity of image, rather than in the rhetoric of the printed word’ (Hutchings and Rulyova 2009, 4). At the same time, television technologies make possible a live, face-to-face mode of communication, which

permits a dissemination of information which could potentially destroy totalising ideologies. From the start, ‘the essence of the medium has been identified with a paradigmatic form of transmission: the live broadcast’ (Ericson 2011, 139). Television was perceived as the medium that shows ‘What is going on?’, rather than ‘What has been?’. But these days it ‘seems to be quite a lot of history on television’ (Ericson 2011, 139). ‘It might be confirmed systematically by studying the schedules of an average week (realising how the better part of your prime time viewing could easily be spent looking backwards through fiction, documentatirs, docudramas)’ (Ericson 2011, 139). Russian television is hardly an exception from the rule. From 1995 on, Russian television channels have ‘monopoly on history’ and broadcasts productions, usually described by my respondents, by audiences and by critics as ‘nostalgic’: *Starii Televisor*,¹ *Namedni: Nasha Era* (Leonid Parfenov, NTV, 1997–2000), *Staraia Kvartira* (Anatoly Malkin, Rossiia, 1996–2000) and *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* (Leonid Parfenov and Konstantin Ernst, Channel 1, 1995–2000). Three such programmes are the objects of study in this chapter. But before I proceed with the analysis of these programmes I will say a few words about television in Russia.

Understanding the power of television, the Soviet Department of Information and Propaganda centrally dominated and controlled television programming. While the agenda for news broadcasting was subordinate to *Pravda* newspaper editorials, entertainment programming was considered of secondary importance. However, by the 1970s the party could no longer resist the penetrating power of Western culture and the growth of Soviet popular culture. The result was the birth of Soviet television culture with its comedies, television drama and emphasis on ‘high literary values as a means of demarcating native television culture from decadent western consumerist “trash”’ (Hutchings and Rulyova 2009, 6). During perestroika, when investigative journalism first established itself in the Soviet Union, television was characterised by adamant criticism of the status quo and ‘hand wringing about the excesses of the Stalinist past’ (Hutchings and Rulyova 2009, 7). Despite the proclaimed freedom of speech and the new Press Act of 1990, political forces retained control

¹ Broadcast on NTV in 1997–2001. The programme took the form of a talk show in which invited guests told various stories. The programme’s anchors were Lev Novozhenov and Dmitry Dibrov.

over the media. Boris Yeltsin reasserted power over television broadcasting by economic means: while maintaining ownership of the main governmental channels, he reduced state funding, forcing television to depend on advertising. Until 1993 it seemed that the idea of independent media in Russia was becoming reality, but after the crackdown against parliamentary rebellion, the media were brought under the pressure of a new power. After the Chechen war, dreams of independent media in Russia almost disappeared, and during the presidential elections of 1996, the media were no longer independent: the majority willingly supported the president Boris Yeltsin (Zassoursky 1999; Mickiewicz 1999). This loyalty was, apparently, maintained both ideologically and economically: editors, who became the owners of media outlets, had claims on active independent position. In the second half of the 1990s ‘the political process moved to the symbolic space of the broadcast media’, which led to the formation of a ‘media-political system’, which is characterised by the process of institutionalisation of new centres of power in the mass media and by the role of large media holdings as political parties (Zassoursky 1999; Vartanova and Smirnov 2009).

In the late 1990s, the media-political system underwent a dramatic transformation which was shaped by the resignation of Boris Yeltsin and resulted in battles between different interest groups, which in turn determined mass media policies. The oligarchs who had gained ownership of media houses in the 1990s lost their media businesses in 2000–2001, while independent journalism was silenced (Belin 2002). When Putin seized power over television, he began using it as ‘a propaganda tool with which to promote his agenda of rebuilding popular belief in a militarily strong, self-confident, stable and united Russia’ (Hutchings and Rulyova 2009, 10). The imbalances in television coverage of important events caused the gradual popular distrusts of the media (Gehlbach 2010).

5.1. Nostalgia on Stage and Television in the 1990s

5.1.1. Nostalgia in the TV Shows *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* and in the plays *Pesni Nashego Dvora* and *Pesni Nashei Kommunal'ki*

Several scholars have argued that nostalgia as an emotional experience is often triggered by music and connected to musically evoked autobiographical memories (Janata, Tomic and Rakowski 2007; Zentner,

Grandjean and Scherer 2008). Researchers have identified *episodic memories*, which often have emotional components, as one of several possible mechanisms for the musical evocation of emotion (Juslin and Västfjäll 2008). Some have suggested that ‘the triggers of nostalgia during musical episodes are the particular associations the individual has formed between a given piece of music and past events (i.e., the autobiographical salience of a particular song for a given person) and the basic emotions that those events evoke’ (Barette et al. 2010, 391). What happens is that a piece of familiar music serves as the soundtrack of a mental movie that starts playing in our minds and recalls memories of a particular person or place. This explains the popularity of disco parties such as the international music festival *Diskoteka 80* (‘Disco of the 1980s’).²

Although music is not the focus of this dissertation, I would like to illustrate briefly how music serves as a clue, showing how nostalgic remembering takes on dramatised forms, linking affects into narratives, while simultaneously connecting the individual’s inner emotions with collective rituals. Because music is important as a trigger of nostalgic emotional experiences, I will begin the description and analysis of dramatic productions with two plays and one television show in which songs are the central element. The juxtaposition of theatre and television productions will illustrate how different media appropriate music in representations of the past, and also show how those representations can differ depending on the nature of the medium.

Synopsis of the TV Programmes and Plays

At the same time as the restaurant Petrovich opened its doors to the public in 1996, the television and theatre landscape burst out with new productions which narrated stories about life in the Soviet Union through a musical prism.

Starie Pesni o Glavnom (‘The old songs about what matters’, Leonid Parfenov and Konstantin Ernst, 1995–2000) was a series of four televised musicals, the first of which aired on New Year’s Eve on Russian TV’s Channel 1 in the 1990s. The series consisted of four freestanding musical episodes (*Starie Pesni o Glavnom 1, 2, 3* and *Postscript*) starring famous

² The festival, organised by the radio station *AvtoRadio*, was held in Moscow beginning in the early 2000s and in St. Petersburg as well until 2012. At this festival, international and Russian bands and individual artists performed hits of the 1970s and 80s.

pop artists performing popular songs of the 20th century. The first episodes presented different decades of the USSR, while the last one reviewed the whole 20th century. *Starie Pesni o Glavnom 1* (Leonid Parfenov and Konstantin Ernst 1995) visualised a version of the postwar Soviet state. It presented songs of various genres from traditional folk and prison folklore (*blatnye pesni*) to popular film songs of the 1940s and '50s.³ *Starie Pesni o Glavnom 1* had many similarities with the Soviet-era patriotic musical genre (Stalin's favourite genre), which celebrated the industrial and agricultural achievements of the Soviet state and the life of the working and peasant classes (Boym 1995).⁴ *Starie Pesni o Glavnom 2* (Leonid Parfenov and Konstantin Ernst 1996) explored the 1960s. It was designed to resemble a widely admired Soviet programme broadcast on New Year's Eve, *Novogodnii Goluboi Ogoniok* (1962–1985).⁵ This resemblance was purposeful. *Novogodnii Goluboi Ogoniok* was one of the most recognisable markers of the Soviet culture and could easily trigger emotional nostalgia in the viewers as people had customarily watched it in large groups with friends and family, so that it was an important experience in their autobiographies. As one journalist said, 'This TV programme united a large country, even in those years when it had nothing in common [...]. Actually, its history is a history of the Soviet Union and Russia' (Larina, 2006). The set of *Starie Pesni o Glavnom 2* was decorated to resemble that of *Goluboi Ogoniok*, while its exterior recalled the 'Television Theatre' where *Goluboi Ogoniok* had been filmed before it was moved to the Ostankino television centre. Like its predecessor, *Starie Pesni o Glavnom 2* featured popular songs as well as music from popular films of the 1960s. Both Soviet and Western music were included in the show. *Starie Pesni o Glavnom 3* (Konstantin Ernst 1997) was composed of songs that had been popular in the 1970s and presented the Brezhnev era through the cinematic lens. It was also conceived as a sequel to the popular 1970s comedy *Ivan Vassilievich Meniaet Professiiu* (Ivan Vassilievich, Leonid Gaidai 1973), and therefore had a story line, unlike

³ For the list of songs, see Appendix 3.

⁴ For example, *Kubanskii Kasaki* ('The Cossacks from Cuba', Pir'ev 1949) or *Volga* (G. Aleksandrov 1938).

⁵ The programme was first broadcast in 1962 under the title *Televisionnoe kafe*. Later it aired under the titles *Na Ogonek*, *Na Goluboi Ogonek*, and *Goluboi ogonek*. In the beginning of its history, the programme was broadcast every week. Later it was only shown on public holidays, and *Novogodnii Goluboi Ogonek* only on New Year's Eve. During perestroika, the format of the New Year's Eve programmes changed, but the programme was revived again in the 1990s (Larina, 2006).

Starie Pesni o Glavnom 1 and 2. In the 1973 film, the Soviet scientist Shurik invents a time machine and accidentally sends his neighbour Ivan Vassilievich Bunsha and the thief Gorge Milosslavski to the 16th century, while bringing the tsar Ivan the Terrible to the 1970s. In the film the tsar is returned to his own time, while in the TV musical, he escapes back to the 1970s and is attracted by the work of the film industry. In order to find the missing tsar, who is already working at the Moscow film studio Mosfilm, Shurik and his friends use the time machine to travel back to the 1970s. While the main characters are searching for Ivan the Terrible, they stumble onto the sets of several films produced during the Brezhnev era.

In the fourth and last version, *Starie Pesni o Glavnom, Postscript* (2000), characters revisit various decades of the 20th century. The events take place in a mythical hotel in the middle of nowhere. The guests (played by Russian actors and pop-artists) occupy hotel rooms numbered by the year of the song they sing, and one by one they cover various popular songs of the 20th century. The different decades of the century coexist in one mythical space, and a viewer or listener could theoretically travel from one year to another by opening the doors of the rooms.

In the 1990s, the Moscow theatre *U Nitiskikh Vorot* (Nikitski Gates) presented two new productions directed by Mark Rozovski, *Pesni Nashego Dvora* ('Songs of our courtyard', 1996) and *Pesni Nashei Kommunalki* ('Songs of our communal flat', 1999), both of which are still running today. *Pesni Nashego Dvora* is performed outdoors in the theatre courtyard every summer when the weather is at its finest, while *Pesni Nashei Kommunalki* is played indoors during winter. The genre of these two theatrical performances could be described as a musical play with some elements of musical comedy, an entertaining show in which the main focus is on the songs performed by the theatre artists, not the plot. The form combines songs performed by a set number of characters, elements of spoken dialogue, and interaction with the audience, conducted by the director of the play. The audience takes an active role in the play by singing along with the actors and occasionally by being involved in the action on the stage. The action in the first play takes place in the theatre's small courtyard, enclosed on all sides by low Moscow buildings. In the second play, which is more thoroughly scripted and staged than the seemingly more improvised *Pesni Nashego Dvora*, the action takes place on a set representing an old communal flat. There is no main plot line, but each character narrates his or her story through musical performance.

Representing the Past in Theatre and on Television

In their analysis of the show *Starie Pesni o Glavnom*, the Russian media scholars Anna Novikova and Eugenia Dulo find that, for the first time after perestroika, this television programme depicted the Soviet Union not as an object of criticism but as the 'lost paradise' (Novikova and Dulo 2011, 194). Despite the grotesqueness of the characters, emotions, settings and sick humour, they write, an important message was sent to the audiences: unlike modern songs, Soviet songs were about the important things in life: love, friendship, sincerity and the belief in a better tomorrow. Novikova and Dulo suggest that the viewers of these New Year's musicals felt a longing, not for Soviet ideology and communal farms, but for their dreams and hopes that the future would be better than the past (Novikova and Dulo 2011). One might even argue that *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* represented not only a dream of the past in a better tomorrow, but also a dream of a better past. This was the past that the people need not be ashamed of or continue feeling collective guilt for. Various cinema and cartoon characters from the 1970s alongside 'real' historic figures affirmed this interpretation. Tsar Ivan the Terrible, presented as a would-be actor, shakes hands with the animated characters Volk and Zaiats and with fictionalised versions of Vladimir Lenin and Josef Stalin, who smoke in the corridor between their scenes. The negation of malevolent personas makes it possible to portray the Soviet period as a fairy tale whose outcome could be changed by means of a dramaturgical time machine. The portrayal of Lenin, Stalin and Ivan the Terrible as figures from a bad dream (the main character wakes up at the end of the show) and fictional characters turns the past into a more or less tolerable story, one that can be happily forgotten upon waking up.

At the same time, the imagery, the sets and the interior of the studio where the programmes were filmed looked too sanitised. The polished façades, the characters' colourful costumes, the fancy old cars and the well-preserved faces of celebrity stars – all this creates a sterilised picture of the past. The two theatre plays look totally different: their main characters inhabit an old communal flat, with all its consequences in the form of shabby clothing and furniture, or they populate a central Moscow courtyard with a rusty metal staircase and washing hung on lines to dry. The positive, polished image of the past in the televised musicals is also attained here by the use of popular songs, which often communicate joy and satisfaction with life, pride in the country, and 'the boy-loves-girls-

loves-tractor stories' (von Geldern and Stites 1995). These songs belonged to the layer of officially sanctioned pop culture of the period, celebrated by the majority of the population. The songs called *blatnye*, *vorovskie*, *lagernye* or *dvorovye pesni* which are also used in Mark Rozovski's plays belonged to a different layer of Soviet culture. Much, although not all, of this culture originated in prison and penal camp folklore and in urban courtyards, and was often spread by word of mouth (Glotov and Guliaigrodskaja 2002).

The reasons for choosing these prison folklore songs (*blatnye pesni*) in the plays can be multiple. First of all, the genre of dramatic theatre (as opposed to vaudeville or televised musicals, for instance) demands serious content reflecting complex and conflicting aspects of people's lives in the society. Second, Mark Rozovski's personal experience during the time of purges formed the basis for the plays. Third, the space of the courtyard (or the communal flat setting, in the case of *Pesni Nashei Kommunaliki*) where the play is performed determines its genre as a musical play and its content, the songs: 'What can you play in the courtyard? You can sing *dvorovye pesni* (courtyard folk songs,' the director remarked (Rozovski 2012). Rozovski described this musical heritage as something very specific to the Russian culture of the Soviet period, which was shaped by the rough experiences of purges and crime. 'These songs, they were a part of informal culture, they countered officialdom, for the performance of some of the songs in Soviet times one could end up in prison' (Rozovski 2012). The unofficial culture, as Rozovski called it, reflected in these songs was impregnated with feelings, sentimentality and sublime portrayals of people. It became an island of salvation in the postwar world of official discourse which was cold and formal, pathetic and fake.⁶ Unofficial culture, in the eyes of the director, was able to offer people real affection, while the official culture contained nothing but the simulation of affection. The reaction to official simulations of real human emotions was these *vorovskie pesni*, thieves' songs, whose rude diction and harsh meanings deconstructed the flaws in official culture. The reality of horror and repression was preserved in these songs, and people who understood what the songs were about were 'the ones who remembered'. In this case, the songs stimulated a longer and more complex process of remembering. However, an important condition for the success of this process is that

⁶ One of the most detailed and profound scholarly works on the topic of folklore songs in the Soviet Union is Jakobson, M, and Jakobson, L (2001).

listeners understand the stories told in the songs and recognise the horrors of the past. People who were not familiar with this layer of Soviet culture due to their personal experiences and/or their age needed explanations in order to understand their multifaceted meanings. If the historical background is not explained accurately, then the whole meaning of these songs could be distorted, misunderstood. To avoid misinterpretations of the songs, the director acted during both plays as an important mediator between the complex song content and the audience. During the performances, he emphasised, vocally and by facial expressions, certain words which were central to the understanding of the songs' content. As a living witness and the son of a repressed Soviet citizen, he connected past and present in his own persona. And in the songs there is a story of both tragedy and happiness which is familiar to him from his own firsthand experience and the collective experience he shared with many other people.

Identity Construction and Nostalgia

When I asked Mark Rozovski for an interview after watching the play *Staraia Kwartira*, he immediately refused. He insisted that his creative work had nothing to do with nostalgia and that he had never been nostalgic for communism. Only after I reassured him that I am not a bleeding-heart communist did he agree to spare me a few minutes. When I asked Rozovski whether *Pesni Nashego Dvora* was a nostalgic play, he said that neither it nor *Pesni Nashei Kommunkalki* could by any means be considered nostalgic. Only after he defined nostalgia for the Soviet period as an attempt to restore a totalitarian political regime, I understood why he so strongly reacted to my question about nostalgia in the plays. To use Svetlana Boym's term, he referred to 'restorative nostalgia':

I can't stand that word [nostalgia]. Because, personally, I do not experience any nostalgia for *sovok* [pejorative term for the Soviet regime], totalitarianism and Stalinism, and I don't want my songs to be even partially confused with this so-called *nostal'girovanie* [feeling or experience of nostalgia]. (Rozovski 2012)

Rozovsky speaks about political nostalgia for communism and about restoration of communist regime and ideology. Nostalgia becomes an important divide, which marks today political preferences and core indication of identity:

I sing a song about Comrade Stalin which was composed by Juz Aleshkovski, a well-known human rights activist and writer, and a friend of mine, who emigrated to America. When he was a 17-year-old lad, he was imprisoned for anti-Soviet activities and songs.⁷ You understand whose side I'm on? I am with Juz Aleshkovski, not with Alexander Prokhanov.⁸ Prokhanov is modern chatterer and demagogue. He calls us back to Stalinism. He proclaims nostalgia for *sovok*. Well, let him be nostalgic. Democracy, unfortunately, allows him to do so. (Rozovski 2012)

Hence he established two competing camps by talking about nostalgia: the one which unites people who want the return of the past and the one that ensembles those who try to prevent this restoration, Rozovski included. One of the strategies to stop restoration from happening is to recall the real past through the active process of remembering by means of music: 'We stand against it [Stalinism] thanks to these songs. Because these songs oppose everything these people are supposedly nostalgic for' (Rozovski 2012). Another camp in his opinion consists of two categories of people: the Stalinists, who want the return of totalitarianism, and those who are ignorant of the past. In describing the other group, Rozovski turns to medical terminology, calling them 'degenerative misguided people' and 'sick people', as both groups are unwilling to be critical and reflective towards the past and actively want a restoration of the old state (Rozovski 2012). He calls nostalgia an 'illness' which affects many people in contemporary Russia. At the same time, Rozovski makes nostalgia illegal by turning it into criminal offence because it betrays the memory of those who suffered under the Soviet regime: 'That is even worse, you know, that is even more criminal! It's a crime to call for a return to the past today! Nostalgia for *sovok* – it's a moral crime! It means calling for a return to the immorality of that time' (Rozovski 2012).

Rozovski offers an example of a strategy opposite to his in which music, he finds, plays a different role: rather than forcing people to remember and submit to discourses of restoration of an authoritarian regime, it leads them to forget the dramas of the past and installs a positive

⁷ Russian scholars A.S. Arkhipova and S. U. Nekliudov presented data on the punishments for 'anti-Soviet' activity, including circulation of songs. See Arkhipova A.S., Nekliudov S. U. (2010)

⁸ Alexander Prokhanov is a Soviet and Russian writer and the editor-in-chief of the extreme-right newspaper *Zavtra*. In 1991 he supported GKCHP and in 1996 Gennady Ziuganov.

image of the Soviet period in people's minds. He chooses the example of the *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* television shows and compares them to his own productions. From Rozovski's point of view, *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* lacks a critical attitude. He finds that the actors and singers hardly understood the meaning of the songs they were performing and the suffering behind them, and so destroyed their immanent sincerity. As the songs were written during the darkest hours of Soviet history, they were full of intimacy, melody and humanity, aimed at 'protecting the individual, keeping his or her identity intact' (Rozovski 2012). But precisely this human strand in the songs was lost when they were performed by pop stars. He claims that, instead of forcing people to remember, the television show paved the way to a forgetting of what had 'really happened' – meaning the purges and oppression of people with an oppositional mindset. One might argue that from the point of view of memory studies, *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* represented a *repetition memory*, using Ricoeur's concept (Ricoeur 2000/2006, 79). Relying on Sigmund Freud and his repetition compulsion, Ricoeur talks about a substitute for a genuine memory through which the present and the past could be reconciled with each other, and hence is one possible way of coping with the past. Instead of remembering, one can observe in *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* an 'acting out' of the process of remembering the traumatic past. The TV show uses a *repetition memory*, which is resistant to criticism, while the *recollection memory* in Rozovski's plays is a fundamentally critical memory. While the songs chosen by Rozovski mediated complex and tragic individual and collective narratives of the past; they bear witness to the dramatic events of the purges and the war, the other project became a 'parody of Soviet song culture', while the songs were flooded with 'false interpretations' (Rozovski 2012). Comparing the television production and his plays, Mark Rozovski stresses the importance of his contribution to the portrayal of the Soviet past: the producers of the television show 'created the old songs about the most important thing, while we did the most important songs about the old things [italics mine]. Feel the difference!'

Parody in Starie Pesni o Glavnom

In fact, *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* hardly created an image of a postwar paradise. It was rather a mockery of that idealised image. The show mocked the 'uncut optimism' of the Soviet mass culture, which role was not to report the truth, but to 'inspire and mold' (Geldern 1995, xx). Such

a deliberate emphasis on the artificiality of space, the awareness of stopped time and the theatricality of human affections produced a ridiculing effect. Yet *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* was not satire, as it did not have any active and effective political content. The authors did not make any definite statement by mocking the Soviet Union. In this sense, *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* is an example of the postmodernist practice of intertextuality. By its composition of citations and reminiscences of other cultural forms – films, songs and TV shows produced during the Soviet period – *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* entered into a dialogue with those texts of Soviet culture. *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* represented an intertext in which parody, presenting relatively polemical, allusive imitations of elements of Soviet culture, was one of the main strategies of representation.

In her *Theory of Parody*, Linda Hutcheon defines parody as ‘alleged representation, usually comic, of a literary text or other artistic object – i.e. a representation of a “modelled reality,” which is itself a particular representation of an “original reality”’ (Hutcheon 2000, 2000c, 49). A parody is in essence a work created to mock or poke fun at an original work in an ironic, humorous manner. This TV show mocked the whole seriousness and absurdity of official life and the propaganda in the Soviet media in a kitschy and unserious manner. For example, in *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* 3, the producers ironically mocked a Soviet newsreel, an episode of the programme *Vremia* (‘Time’, first broadcast in the 1970s), and its serious attitude towards the official Soviet discourse.⁹ This mockery was neither a sign of ignorance or political affiliation Rozovsky was talking about. In his interviews, one of the producers of this show Leonid Parfenov, reacting to critics’ remarks about his work on television, often showed his profound erudition in regard to Soviet history. Being well versed in matters of Soviet popular culture and Soviet history, Parfenov and his colleagues were able to take a critical distance in order to create different levels of ‘ironic inversion’.

What could have been in fact another reason for criticism is the open commercial use of the past. In *Starie Pesni o Glavnom*, one can observe how the official, empowered Soviet culture was ‘selectively appropriated’ in a mocking way by Russian capitalism in the 1990s. The process was

⁹ Yurchak describes the idea of mocking Soviet discourses in detail in ‘Night Dances with the Angel of History: Critical Cultural Studies of Postsocialism,’ in Aleksandr Etkind, ed, *Cultural Studies*. St. Petersburg: European University Press, 2006 (In Russian).

hardly a dialogue between marginalised and dominant spheres of Soviet reality. It more closely resembled a commercial takeover of saleable content. Because Soviet films and music were still very popular among Russian audiences in the mid-1990s, the appropriation of that culture in any format could bring success and commercial profit. The format and content of the show was a promotion in itself. With a cast of Russian celebrities of the 1990s, it was able to attract maximum visibility in the television market. Well-known Soviet television shows and films became the frames in which Russian pop stars were set. This representational strategy, to use Oushakine's words, 'doubly enhanced the effect of recognition'. 'Amalgamating in space and time two recognisable images', it supplied the necessary historical backdrop for the post-Soviet celebrities, and at the same time popularised Soviet films (Oushakine 2007, 462). 'Material clichés of past decades – a red kerchief, a signature military hat (*budenovka*), or a typical military blouse (*gimnasterka*)': in an 'aesthetic of temporal cross-dressing, recognisable elements of the daily life' framed Russian pop stars of the 1990s (Oushakine 2007, 471). The popularity of *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* was immense. It was broadcast several times on the major Russian television channels, issued on DVD and CD, and published on the Internet. With time, the reputation of a parody outlasted the reputation of what it parodied. Many people, especially the younger generation, remembered the songs as they were performed in *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* without actually knowing the original version.

Possibly while parodying Soviet popular culture, the producers also alienated half their audience. As we have seen in Rozovski's comments, people were able to take this parody seriously and miss the irony, even though the producers of *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* knew very well who their target audience was and produced the show specifically for that audience. They intended this TV show as light entertainment for the New Year's celebration and did not pretend to offer an objective and 'correct' portrayal of the Soviet period.

Another possible explanation for this criticism is a confrontation between 'high' and 'popular' culture, if I am allowed to make such a strict distinction. Television and especially such shows as *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* was not considered credible enough medium for the 'truthful' representation of the past. This can be illustrated by Rozovski's words. He insisted that his theatre plays were shown before the television shows were

broadcast on TV. In fact, *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* was first broadcast on New Year's Eve of 1996, while the play was first performed in summer of that year. This is how Mark Rozovski remembers himself the events:

After the play had toured across Europe, been broadcast on television and become very successful among audiences, suddenly our TV came up with a project. That is, they stole my idea, they were well aware of our play, and it was, I repeat, had been shown already. They did their project. (Rozovski 2012)

This shows how Rozovski's own memory was shaped by the inclination to create his own identity and the identity of his theatre in opposition to the famous television production. He changed the order of events to strengthen his argument and to illustrate the avant-garde role of the *high art*, theatre, in comparison to *low culture*, television, and to show how ideas can be borrowed from one cultural form into another, and reshaped in the process.

The Nostalgia Paradox

Rozovski pointed out that the television shows compared to the theatre plays were 'nostalgic' by nature. Meanwhile, the press evidently found nostalgia in the theatre plays directed by Rozovski. *Pesni Nashego Dvora* was described as 'a very Russian play, live, human, touching, sentimental, which appeals to a sensitive and compassionate heart', in which 'absolutely everyone found a motive for nostalgia' (Vash Dosug 2004). In the reviews of the play reproduced on the theatre's website, one journalist even called *Pesni Nashego Dvora* a 'nostalgic show': 'Sunday rain did not hinder those who came to 'Luzha' [the Luzhniki arena, where the play was performed] to hear and sing 'songs of our courtyard'. This was the name of the nostalgic show prepared by the newspaper department of literature and clockwork, the Theatre at Nikitski Gates' (*Moskovskii Komsomolets* 2008). Words like 'nostalgia', 'nostalgic longing', 'nostalgic atmosphere', 'to feel nostalgia' (i.e., the Russian verb *nostal'girovat'*) and 'to be nostalgic' were constantly present in reviews of the play: 'There is nothing more pleasant than an opportunity to experience nostalgia once again [*ponastal'girovat'*], even if it's nostalgia for our childhood' (Moshkova 2008).

The main question is why the play, whose author categorically refused to call it nostalgic, was described and reviewed as nostalgic and as a show

that induced nostalgic sentiments in its audience. The problem lies in the claim that nostalgia is inherent in television programmes or in the media producers. It indicates a predisposition towards the media text as the primary locus of meaning. In fact the meaning of a text is on the boundary between text and audience. Despite of the possible programme makers intentions to 'inject' their preferred, established meanings into willing, receptive audiences, audiences decode meanings in all possible ways, ranging from acceptance of the 'dominant meaning' encoded in the text to 'negotiated meanings' in which viewers modify the dominant meanings by their own counter-establishment readings (Hall 1980; 1994).

What is evident in the reviews is that journalists rarely talked about the political nostalgia that Rozovski refers to. Many of them talked about another form of nostalgia, longing more for the atmosphere of the rapidly disappearing old Moscow courtyards with their ordinary inhabitants: the rake, cap askew; the buxom 'Aunt Rose' in a bathrobe with a towel around her head; the active lady in her faded brown coat, etc. (Pavlichenko 2004). According to one journalist, 'the viewer imperceptibly plunges into the nostalgic atmosphere of the courtyards of the middle of the last century' (Pavlichenko 2004). The atmosphere created in the theatre courtyard triggered the audience's memories of their own childhood and youth, their own memories of everyday life in a typical Moscow courtyard in the 1950s. They longed for the everyday, familiar sounds, smells, food – everything that could trigger positive memories of their youth. Good-hearted laughter, sincerity and a feeling of community – this is what journalists saw as the object of nostalgic longing, and indeed they found it in the play: the audience laughs and cries along with the inhabitants of this courtyard; sings along, drinks and snacks at the same time, since vodka and sandwiches are brought around three times during the play. How else could one heartily plunge into nostalgic languor? It was an innocence recalled by the atmosphere, stimulated by the staged environment and the collective experience of singing, which brought people together. The journalist Olga Mashkova wrote that people loved Rozovski's play 'for its purity and innocence, which we have deprived ourselves of' (Moshkova 2008). The moments of sincerity and joy in spite of all circumstances, the simple human life that Aleksei Yurchak describes as the main subject of post-Soviet nostalgia: that is what the journalists saw, and what they believed the public were longing for. 'When we could find moments to laugh carelessly, no matter what happened [...]. There was a time when

we empathised with all the oppressed, destitute, and enslaved in the world, believing that we were amazingly lucky to be born in our country' (Tyssovskia, *Nostalzhii ot Bezdenezhia*).

The journalists themselves did not deny that they experienced nostalgic longing, but they stressed even more that it was the people, the public, who were nostalgic. The journalist Natalia Bogatireva wrote that it was nostalgia that brought people to the theatre to see this amazing play (Bogatireva 1998). Both the journalists and Rozovski himself saw nostalgia in the audiences for whom the play was performed. However, they defined nostalgia differently: while Rozovski believed that people were nostalgic for the old regime and claimed that people who wanted the return of the old order were physiologically ill, the journalists understood nostalgia as light-hearted longing for the time of youth and the belief in a brighter future that goes with youth. It is important to note that the journalists identified themselves through this nostalgia, which created a sense of belonging and alliance with a certain group of people who shared the same type of sentiments and memories.

So, in fact what we need to talk about is 'Who is speaking or performing nostalgia?', (Todorova and Gille 2010, 7). 'After all, none of the subjects of nostalgia, the once who are producing its artefacts and who are identified as its agents, define it as nostalgia' (Todorova and Gille 2010, 7). Nostalgia is an 'ascriptive term', which is continuously avoided as a self-description' (Todorova and Gille 2010, 7), but often used to describe others and to mark political affiliation. To call someone nostalgic often becomes a vituperative term used against one's opponents or label the producers and journalists can ascribe to the audiences.

5.1.2. The Soviet Past in *Namedni 1961–1991: Nasha Era*

The programme *Namedni 1961–1991: Nasha Era* ['Recently, 1961–1991: our era'] was a kind of encyclopaedia of Soviet life in the format of a TV documentary series.¹⁰ I will analyse this programme because it introduces important themes for a theoretical discussion of nostalgia later in this chapter.

Namedni was produced and hosted by the Russian journalist Leonid Parfenov. The documentary presented a rich mosaic of information ranging from global political news, surveys of local events, glorious sports

¹⁰ Serguei Oushakine (2013) has examined this programme in the context of documentary programmes.

achievements and economic commentaries to discussions of fashion trends, cultural events, popular films and TV programmes. The programme also provided experts' opinions on and some sort of analysis of the events described. The flow of episodes illustrating different aspects of Soviet life was interspersed with short joke sequences of 15 to 20 seconds – that is, Parfenov's stand-ups were inserted in official Soviet newsreels: Parfenov hunting with Nikita Khrushchev, Parfenov and Forrest Gump in the White House, Parfenov translates Mikhail Gorbachev's talk for Reagan, Parfenov inside the Mir space station, Parfenov courting and kissing Marilyn Monroe, Parfenov lighting Castro's cigar, Parfenov with Leonid Brezhnev at official ceremony.

It was aired on March 1, 1997, on the NTV channel. When the series began in 1997, Leonid Parfenov became the broadcaster's chief producer, and he remained in that position until 1999, so that we may assume he was more or less in full control of the programme's content. The programme was broadcast until 2004, and although it changed its genre in 2001 from 'documentary project' to 'current affairs programme', Parfenov remained loyal to his previous idea: at the end of each year (until 2003), he released a special edition of the programme which summed up the whole year. On January 31, 2003, the programme won the television industry's annual TEFI award in the category 'Information-analysis programme'. In 2004, the programme was dropped and Parfenov was fired from NTV in connection with a scandal about the programme.¹¹ In 2007, Leonid Parfenov began work on a new project closely connected with the television show *Namedni 1961–1991: Nasha Era*: a book with the same title divided into four volumes, each representing a decade of the Soviet period.¹² The publication was based on materials Parfenov had collected with the help of friends, acquaintances and readers of his blog. According to the journalist, the book project included much more information than the TV programme, both in the number of topics and in the space allotted to each one.

¹¹ See <http://www.newsru.com/russia/01jun2004/parfenov.html>.

¹² Initially the project consisted of only four volumes, but then was extended and included three more, describing the epoch after 1991. At the point of writing this dissertation Parfenov published seven volumes, the last three covering periods 1991–2000, 2001–2005, 2006–2010.

Time and Narrative in Namedni

By means of a TV documentary, Leonid Parfenov narrates the life of Soviet people who lived in a complex interaction with the state. He presents the Soviet citizens and the Soviet state as the two main characters of the narrative. The lives of these two characters is set in the time interval between 1961 (the starting point of a new consumerist era serves as a date of 'birth') and 1991 (the moment when this life ended marks the characters' 'death'). By narrating successive events year by year in *Namedni*, Parfenov configures both his own and his viewers' experiences of the time 'before' and 'after' 1991. Inspired by Ricoeur's (1991) ideas, I see two kinds of time presented in *Namedni*. There is a sequence of incidents on the one hand, and the story presents a sequence of configurations on the other, from initiation (1961) through culmination (1985) to closure (1991). The series is built on the principle of chronological development: starting with 1961, each story about one year is followed by a story about another year.

Serguei Oushakine has said that Parfenov uses the 'deconstruction of the totality' of the late socialist period by means of diachronic narration, narration dealing with a phenomenon that changes over time, to show the absence of any evolution. Oushakine argues that, from the point of view of temporal development, the synchronous narration in *Namedni* is a cinematographic history of stagnation and documents an absence of development, both semantically and socially (Oushakine 2013). I generally agree with Oushakine on this point, but I would add that Parfenov in fact did show a certain process of development which started at the point of departure in 1961 (A) and resulted in the ending in 1991 (B). A closer look with special attention to the commentators' remarks may help us to understand that every incident Parfenov presents has a logical motivation. One example might be the story about socialist industrialisation presented in the episode about 1962. The comments of Egor Gaydar, and especially his words 'everything has a price', illustrated how a certain political decision resulted in the destruction of Soviet agriculture. I would argue that Parfenov presented a meaningful picture of late socialism as a period of history in which apparently interconnected events lead to a certain result: what happened in 1991 was a logical result of the whole era that started in 1961. At the same time, relying on Ricoeur's theory of narrative in which he argues that episodes are connected by a plot into a narrative which is driven by the conclusion, I believe that Parfenov does

manage to construct a meaningful narrative. Knowing the end of the story, that is, what happened to the Soviet Union in 1991, the elements of the narrative help us to understand that the revolutions of 1989 and 1991 were the only possible outcome.

An analysis of one episode of the series will serve to illustrate this point. The first episode depicts the key events of the year 1961 as selected by the producers of the programme. The episode is 36 minutes and 55 seconds long, and includes 23 topics, an introduction, several bumpers and an announcement of the next episode. Later episodes are longer: the episodes about the 1980s were about 45 to 60 minutes long and included some 30 topics. The sequence of the 'topics of the year' presented in the first episode of the series is as follows:

1. On January 1, a new monetary reform is introduced in the USSR (approximately 40 sec.)
2. In February, the dog Strelka, who had travelled to space in August 1960, has six puppies (30 sec.)
3. 'Corn – the queen of the fields': In 1961 the Khrushchev corn planting campaign reaches its zenith (3 min. 30 sec.)
4. The Soviet film *Chelovek – Amfibia* ('Human-amphibian') is released (1 min.)
5. Yuri Gagarin's first space flight starts on April 12 (3 min. 30 sec.)
6. Flower arrangement becomes a popular hobby (40 sec.)
7. Stiletto heels are in fashion (1 min. 20 sec.)
8. The Bay of Pigs Invasion in Cuba begins and ends in April (2 min. 20 sec.)
9. Standard, large-panel five-story houses – 'khrushchevki' – beat all building records (1 min. 20 sec.)
10. The last Soviet operetta artist, Tatiana Shmiga, is a rising star in 1961 (40 sec.)
11. The hydroelectric power station Bratskaia GES goes on line in November (3 min. 30 sec.)
12. Construction of the Dvorets Siezdov ('Kremlin Congress Palace') is completed (30 sec.)
13. The Soviet athlete Valerii Brumel' sets high-jump records (40 sec.)
14. The 22nd Communist Party Congress begins on October 17 (4 min. 40 sec.)

15. Stalin's remains are removed from the mausoleum on October 31 (30 sec.)
16. Previously banned works of Il'ia Ilf and Evgenii Petrov are published in five volumes during 1961 (1 min. 20 sec.)
17. Rokotov's trial for illegal currency trading begins in May and ends with capital punishment in July (1 min. 40 sec.)
18. The first meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement is held on September 1 to 6 (30 sec.)
19. Oleg Popov becomes the most famous Soviet clown (1 min.)
20. The only meeting between President John Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev takes place in Vienna on July 3–4 (35 sec.)
21. The Soviet song *Khotiat li russkie voini?* ('Do the Russians want war?') becomes popular (50 sec.)
22. The building of the Berlin Wall begins on August 13 (3 min.)
23. The well-known artistic trio Vitsin–Nikulín–Morgunov is formed (1 min. 20 sec.)

This breakdown of the episode by topics presented shows that time was structured at the basic syntactical level: the topics were presented more or less in chronological order. Some topics have to precede others, and the narrative of the year has to unfold from the beginning of the year to its end. But this is not always the case, and often the chronology of the historic events is destroyed. In view of Paul Ricoeur's idea that narrative is a basic form for representing and comprehending the past, present and future, the fact that topics presented in this episode did not always follow one another in the order of their actual unfolding in historic time deserves attention – especially for those interested in the processes of mediation and the role of media in the representation of reality.

The question is, what determines the positions of the film clips in the episodes and the choice of topics? Leonid Parfenov has claimed that it was the format of the TV programme and the technical and aesthetic characteristics of the television medium that dictated his choice of themes and the representation of the selected material: 'I know how today's television works, the requirements of tempo, saturation, intensity and variety placed on the "picture". There are certain standards which must be respected' (Charkin 1998). He also stresses the specifics of the material chosen for the programme, including archive materials, old films and newsreels: 'I

have a specific material – a black-and-white chronicle. I have to work with it in a special way to present it today in the appropriate form. To me, this is true aesthetics' (Charkin 1998). In this account, the amount of time is determined not by the political significance or political impact of the event, but by the visual qualities of the material to be presented. Selected events of the year are presented not according to any logic of temporal development, but rather according to the logic of a 'montage of attractions': a montage of randomly chosen, independent effects intended to stimulate emotional excitement in the audience (Oushakine 2013). In other words, specific characteristics of medium of television influence the representation of historical epoch. Some examples from the episode on 1961 illustrate this influence.

If the duration of each topic in *Namedni* is taken as a measure of its significance, the first meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement on September 1 to 6 (30 sec.) had less media significance than the formation of the famous trio of Soviet comedy actors Georgii Vitsin, Iurii Nikulin and Evgenii Morgunov (1 min. 20 sec.). The latter topic is no doubt more visually powerful because it includes many shots from popular films, and thus presumably stimulates more memories. Even as a contemporary political event, the Non-Aligned Movement and its activities were not constantly present in the everyday life of Soviet citizens – unlike those Soviet actors who were kept in the public eye by Soviet cinema and television. This mode of representing the past, in which serious political events are put together with stories about seemingly banal aspects of everyday life, can be explained by the importance of banal events in the lives of people: everyday difficulties such as the hunt for nylon tights or the attempt to get a paid holiday at a summer resort played a significant role in people's lives. It was people's immediate individual experiences that shaped the memories they associate with a given year. The year 1961, for example, started with the introduction of a new currency, a key event that signalled the beginning of a new consumerist culture, which ended in 1991 with the introduction of another new currency – and the birth of a new country, the Russian Federation.

One of the best examples of the representation of the past in terms of the private sphere may be the treatment of the meeting between President John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev on July 3 and 4 in Vienna (35 sec.). The meeting is discussed in *Namedni*, not in regard to the importance of the two leaders' discussions of the escalating Berlin crisis, but in

regard to a drastic difference of fashions visible in the appearance of the two heads of state and their wives, which is suggestively interpreted as a difference between two political systems reflected in the appearances of their leaders. By putting the spotlight on a banal observation, *Namedni* shifts the focus from the pathos of an official meeting to a personal evaluation of the event.

Thus one of the leading narratives developed by Parfenov in the episodes representing the 1960s and 1970s was the Soviet citizens' quiet but relentless pursuit of their private space and material property in the time of economic mobilisation. The series depicts the process of building a human and material paradise for the Soviet population. Among the very first 'treasures' are a private flat, a car, a deodorant, toilet paper: small but pleasant examples of an improving standard of living. Indeed, to move into a private flat after years of living in communal flats was easily one of the greatest events for many Soviet people since the end of the war. Finally a Soviet citizen could shield her or his private life in an intimate enclosure. With not-too-demanding jobs and low labour productivity, people were able to devote much of their time to leisure, so that a great culture of private life developed in the last decades of Soviet rule. This culture was filled with popular comedies, news about sporting achievements and treasure hunts for new high heeled shoes, and was equally important for the construction of the Soviet person's identity as one of suffering, deprivation, repression and lack of freedom. Similar to the case study presented in the previous chapter, by focusing on private life and creating meaningful stories about Soviet times that ignore the official grand narratives of communist times, and by introducing an alternative narrative, Parfenov democratises history. He shifts its focus from the state to the average person and shows the representatives of his generation that their everyday experiences were important, and that they had become a part of history by participating in the life of late socialism and witnessing the fall of the empire. The space of the studio underlined this idea: every episode begins and ends in a set that looks like a historical archive where the lives of millions of individuals are catalogued, so that the narrator only has to open the appropriate drawer to retrieve fascinating information.

Media played an important role in endorsing the idea that history can be read variously. Often the same film clip was shown simultaneously in its normal appearance and in a mirror image. This split-screen technique visualised the idea that multiple interpretations are possible

(Oushakine 2013). Such a 'radical reciprocity' of the video material gives viewers an opportunity to choose their own trajectory of reading, excluding the possibility that there is only one correct version of history. The visual metaphor suggests that history can be read in different directions and from different perspectives (Oushakine 2013). At the same time, by presenting a different opinion of historical events, *Namedni* downgrades many grand Soviet myths. Famous Soviet industrial achievements or construction projects for example are presented in the programme as obviously disastrous, ill-conceived ideas, motivated by typical Soviet phobias. This was in sharp contrast to the customary pro-Soviet presentation of them as essential and glorious achievements (Boguslavskaja 2011).

Irony played a large role in *Namedni*'s representations of such events and the deconstruction of the myths. For example, Parfenov concluded the story about one of the greatest construction projects of the Khrushchev era, the Bratskaia GES hydroelectric station, with the phrase, 'Later, the Ust-Ilimskaia and Boguchanskaia GES will be built on the Angara River, and the saying will become popular: "The further into the forest, the more GES"' (*Namedni 1961–1991: Nasha Era*, episode 1, '1961'). In the Russian original, the saying 'Chem dalshe v les, tem bolshe GES' is recognisable as a variation on the proverb 'Chem dalshe v les, tem bolshe drov', meaning 'the more deeply one gets involved, the greater the risks'. The effect of sarcasm and irony is achieved not only by recycling old refrains and sayings to humorous effect in the narrative context, but also by the serious and monotonous voice of Parfenov himself and commentators and the choice of biased language. Moreover, the effect is heightened by the journalist's and the commentators' temporal and emotional distance to the information they present. The anchor and the commentators of the programme evaluate the events recounted thirty-eight years after they took place, knowing that the period under discussion has passed and the results of the actions and activities are public knowledge. Khrushchev's much criticised and often despised project of planting maize on the vast farmlands of the Union is also presented ironically: here the ironic effect is produced by the narrator's intonation and comments, and underscored by the split screen: the image is divided into three smaller screens in which two documentaries and a cartoon simultaneously illustrate the story of Khrushchev's project.

Although there are definite indications that the representation of the past is subordinate to a specific TV format, there may still be other explanations for *Namedni*'s specific representation of the past. Certainly one might argue that the examples I have presented in this chapter could also point towards a more profound influence of the medium on the content. For example, the fact that Parfenov sets such a strong focus on elements of everyday life in his representation could also be explained by his need to maximise the programme's ratings, which could be accomplished by attracting the viewers' interest in something to which they feel a close relation – that is, their own individual experiences. This is also supported by Parfenov's statement that he was only doing what people wanted and showing what the public demanded – by which he gives the audience responsibility for the content and presents the medium as an entity capable of satisfying those demands.

*Criticism of the Portrayal of Everyday Life,
Nostalgia and Postmodernism*

Some journalists 'question whether the past we see on the television screen actually is history' and whether 'the history we see on television actually is from the past' (Ericson 2011, 140). Some condemned the show as playing games with history: 'playing with history is a dangerous thing, because what to some is history is to others life, tears, love' (Petrovskaja 1997). Others have interpreted the interest in everyday life as potentially dangerous because it shifts the focus from the grand narratives of the past to the periphery of ordinary life. The destruction of the hierarchy of importance, which became the main method in *Namedni*, was therefore seen as potentially dangerous to historical knowledge: 'as a result, Andronikov's award, space travel, a five-day work week, a break in diplomatic relations with Israel, and so on are impartially placed on a single semantic level' (Davydov and Zotov 1997). They have read *Namedni* in Jameson's terms, as 'images, simulacra, and pastiches of the past', surrogates for 'historical amnesia' (Jameson 1991). The method of deconstruction and repudiation of grand narratives was associated with postmodernist critique. The negative attitude was therefore directed towards the whole idea of a postmodernist way of thinking, including postmodernist nostalgia. Nostalgia was interpreted as an emotion devoid of any critical attitude to the object of nostalgic feeling, and as a purely commercial activity. While history was seen as a science based on the

study of factual events, nostalgia was seen more as a deconstruction of the past through its destruction in which the focus shifts from 'important' political and social events to the secondary, 'unimportant' elements of individual experiences. It was compared with the rewriting of history: 'Parfenov's pathos ... comes down to the practice of postmodernist deconstruction in its post-Soviet version. That is, the destruction of the old hierarchies of meanings and values, and the construction of new ones in their place. When applied to history, it is painfully reminiscent of the Soviet "rewriting of history"' (Davydov and Zotov 1997). Rather than as a journalist making an entertaining documentary programme about the past, Parfenov was presented as someone taking on the role of an historian. What some disliked was his own reflections and point of view as an anchor (see e.g. Davydov and Zotov 1997). They found that the programme reflected a specific system of values and the life experiences of a certain group of people, and could not be considered an objective portrayal of the era. Parfenov was blamed for criticising and destroying the old value system without proposing an alternative.

Criticism of Parfenov's strategy of multiple interpretations was also directed towards the television format as a whole, which was considered unable to meet the criteria of a good history textbook. To the critics, there could be no discussion about which 'historical truth' should be conveyed. One of the main demands made of television as a medium was that it shows past reality 'as it really was': this seems to betray a concept of the medium's role as that of a mirror of 'existing reality'. If television failed to reflect the past 'as it really was', the critics condemned it as nostalgic and thus distorting reality. Media and journalists were blamed for introducing postmodernist aesthetics and logic: 'Postmodernist aesthetics came into our life together with advertising and the new TV, creating its own reality' (Kagarlitsky 1998). Kagarlitsky saw the journalist Leonid Parfonov as one of the principal fighters against history for his use of aesthetics and visual language, and considered the 'unsuccessful TV programme' *Namedni: Nasha Era* to be a postmodernist 'manifesto' (Kagarlitsky 1998). He attacked Parfenov's standpoint by saying his postmodernism 'is struggling to be fun and glamorous, but it turns out dull, sluggish, and lifeless' (Kagarlitsky 1998). Framed in the critique of postmodernism, *Namedni* was presented as an example of how 'history' can be destroyed – and by 'history' the proponents of this position apparently meant the facts and the explanatory paradigm propagated by official institutions. Thus the

rejection of grand historical narratives was conflated with the forgetting of historical facts. Kagarlitsky claimed that the new image of the world was now constructed according to the demands of popular culture, which, by appealing to mass audiences, turned history into comics, easily digestible and entertaining. In this hunt for the mass consumer, post-modernism ironically distances itself from the elements it plays with.

Some have disagreed with such outlook, however, and regarded *Namedni*'s approach to history as the only one possible, because 'history can and should be touched; otherwise the connection between the times will be interrupted. All that matters is a tone that prevents bullying' (Petrovskaia 1997). In this view, the programme offers the perfect introductory study material for the younger generation who are unaware of the main events and iconic figures of the Soviet period. 'The textbook is not intended for those who remember the events captured on its pages. It is necessary for a generation convinced that history began with Bogdan Titomir, McDonald's and computer games' (Petrovskaia 1997). The history of the Soviet Union should therefore be narrated by means of television as the medium most suited to capturing young people's interest and meeting their demands:

Parfenov in every chapter of his textbook provides a set of familiar iconic events defining a particular year, [which is] necessary and adequate for the young who are not familiar with the details of their country's history. Besides, he does it not in the narrative aesthetics of historical and educational television films, but in the dynamic aesthetics of fragmented video. Modern young spectators, accustomed to small-screen forms and zapping between TV channels with the remote control, do not have time to get fed up with another piece of history.... Jokingly and playfully, Parfenov entertains, enlightens, educates, and opens more and more files. The television screen is divided into several parts, each of which contains its own picture, sometimes filling the entire space, styled as a computer screen with its windows and inserts. (Petrovskaia 1997)

For scholar Serguei Oushakine, the programme is not an alternative version of late socialism. He sees it as an attempt to find and show diversity, to document the polyphony which used to be narrowed down to the monologue of authoritarian discourse (Oushakine 2013). Oushakine writes that the aim of documentaries like *Namedni* is not to decode the communist world, but to defocus 'Soviet totality' (Oushakine

2013). By ascribing the same historical value to all late Soviet discourses and artefacts, the producers of *Namedni* openly questioned the existing hierarchy of practices and representations. Moreover, this way of looking at the Soviet past was not invented by Parfenov. I have shown in Chapter 4 that Andrei Bil'zho had already used the same strategy of revisiting the Soviet life. But where Petrovich proposes a strategy that transforms the stream of discourses and actions into material objects, *Namedni* transforms them into visual elements, creating a framework that can incorporate such seemingly incompatible elements as nylon tights and the Gulf wars. In this perspective, no detailed interpretation of these elements is intended. The commentary in the programme is devoid of any precise conclusions; Parfenov and his experts do not try to persuade the viewer of a new version of Soviet history.

This absence of an evaluating eye and a clear moral perspective, which could guide viewers in revisiting the past was one of the main reasons why some criticised the programme. It is remarkable that it was not for the first time in television history that critics 'clearly missed a more specific settling of accounts ("Who won? Who were the good guys and the bad guys?")' (Ericson 2011, 142). Writing about the BBC documentary *Cold War* (1998), media scholar Staffan Ericson points out that the 'critics' frustration at the lack of *any* "moralising impulse" may signal a difference between television history and "history proper" [*italics in original*] (Ericson 2011, 142). 'The narrative of the chain of *real* events could possibly conclude in a summing-up of their "meaning" for "the purpose of moralizing judgments"' [*italics in original*] (White 1990, 24 quoted in Ericson 2011, 142-143). The narrative about the past breaks into the present of the television programme: while narrating about events that happened decades ago, the anchor constantly refers to the present; and even though he does not provide a direct moral evaluation of the epoch by pointing out the good and the bad guys, the viewer can feel how the past is evaluated. In his defence against accusations of destroying hierarchies and equating dissimilar subjects, Parfenov answered that, inspired by the works of Yuri Lotman, he truly believed that the Caribbean crisis, the inauguration of the Druzhba ('Friendship') oil pipeline, Yashin's performance in the Wembley match, and jokes about Commissar Rzhnevski affected people's minds simultaneously (*Argumenti i Fakti* 1997). Parfenov met the criticism directed towards the choice of subjects with a statement that he and his team never omitted any important issues.

The tragic pages of Soviet history were set in the context of people's everyday lives, which continued no matter how dire the circumstances. This debate is well presented in an interview, in which Parfenov explains why he always dressed in a 'stylish' suit and tie, even while talking about such heartbreaking events as the Afghanistan war: 'I am a journalist, not a participant in an event. By necessity I'm close to the event, but not in it. My professional task is a different one. My business is to deliver this picture to your home, to explain something to you in a fun, interesting manner' (Parfenov 1998). Parfenov believed that his role as a journalist was to tackle contemporary trends; because in the 1990s the 'archaeology of Soviet antiquity', as he called the growing interest in the Soviet period, was a hype that created an energetic response among the public, he addressed that theme (*Argumenti i Fakti* 1997). Turning to the Soviet past, and especially to its visual material, was not a result of Parfenov's personal affection for or disaffection with the Soviet way of life or political regime, but a professional response towards what he thought might fascinate audiences and increase ratings, and therefore of commercial value. In this sense, his two roles converged: the professional 'historian' and the professional journalist. As a journalist Parfenov had to comment on the present situation when reporting on 'Soviet antiquity'; as a 'historian' he was obliged to provide an account of what 'actually happened', as well as presenting a coherent narrative.

In fact, Parfenov's words echo the words of a senior consultant of the BBC series, Lewis Gaddis, who also tried to explain the distinct qualities of a historical documentary on television by singling out a common mistake made by the critics of the programme, namely to expect any kind of 'single interpretive framework' (Gaddis 2000 quoted in Ericson 2011, 142). He said that instead of 'historical orthodoxy' and 'moral equivalency' the viewers get exposed to 'historical complexity: a sense of how things looked at the time' (Gaddis 2000 quoted in Ericson 2011, 142). This all-inclusive representation of the past would have been impossible without media technology: 'television makes everything available at the same time and to everyone' (*Argumenti i Fakti* 1997).

5.1.3. Collective Remembering in the TV Programme *Staraia Kvartira*

Each programme is a slice of our history, taken year after year since 1947. The memories of the participants and eyewitnesses of various

events, some of them simulated in *Staraia Kwartira* with all the details of everyday life, reveal the content of this or that year under review. The participants in the programme are prominent political figures, artists, writers, athletes and ordinary citizens with a connection to the events discussed. (http://www.atv.ru/programs_atv/archive_tv/old_flat/)

My interest in the programme *Stararia Kwartira* began after several of my informants had described it as a good example of nostalgia (Raikin 2013). The journalist I. Petrovskaia wrote that *Staraia Kwartira* was a typical nostalgic programme which evoked nostalgic feelings in the older generation of viewers (Petrovskaia 1997). In this section I will analyse how the past was presented in the TV programme *Staraia Kwartira* and examine why the programme was called nostalgia.

Staraia Kwartira in a Nutshell

At the same time as Parfenov's TV show *Namedni* appeared, another federal channel, RTR (now Rossiia 1; launched in 1991 by the All-Union State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company) began broadcasting the programme *Staraia Kwartira* ('The old flat'), which took its guests and viewers backwards in time. *Staraia Kwartira* was produced from 1996 to 1999 by Anatolii Malkin for the ATV company.¹³ In the years from 1998 to 2000, *Staraia Kwartira* won several awards, including TEFI awards in the categories 'Best Journalistic Programme' and 'Best Script' (Viktor Slavkin), and the State Award. Several years later, the television channel included this programme in its list of the most important and symbolic programmes ever broadcast on Russian television.

The format of the programme is best described as a scripted journalistic series in the form of an entertainment talk show about the past. The title, *Staraia Kwartira*, refers to a communal flat, a form of housing common in the USSR in which several families share a flat with several bedrooms. The main characters of the show were inhabitants of such a flat and their guests who came over to celebrate holidays and talk about the past. The programme was broadcast weekly and each episode was

¹³ ATV is Russia's oldest independent private television production company. It was created in the Soviet Union in September 1988, and in September 1989 it aired its first regular programme (*Press Club*). Since then it has produced programs for Channel 1 Ostankino (later ORT), Channel 4 Ostankino (later NTV), TV-6, REN TV, TNT and DTV, as well as Russia-1, TV Center, Russia-K and Carousel. Anatoly Malkin has been its president and head producer since 1994.

dedicated to a specific year in the history of the country. In this way the narration of historical events was chronologically structured as it was in *Namedni*. However, after a while it became clear that all the material collected and filmed did not fit the one-hour episode format, and it was decided to split it into two episodes for each (Kemarskaya 2012). Unlike *Namedni*, the programme presented the year's events in chronological order: each episode started with a New Year's celebration, after which the subsequent events were introduced chronologically.

As an illustrative example, I will look more closely at an episode about 1989 because of that year's significant events, including the fall of communist regimes across Europe and events that led to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. The episode is divided into two parts and was shown over a period of two weeks. The topics presented in the episode and the time allocated to each topic were as follows:

Part 1

1. Celebration of the New Year's Eve, 1988, in *Dom Kino* ('Cinema house'). The show starts with a sketch or 'kapustnik' (about 5 min.)
2. Presentation of the guests (2 min.)
3. Emergence of cooperatives as a new form of economic activity (10 min.)
4. The end of the Afghanistan war (30 min.)

Part 2

5. Introduction (2 min.)
6. Fall of the Berlin Wall (12 min. 30 sec.)
7. The Council of Independent Deputies (5 min. 35 sec.)
8. The Congress of People's Deputies of the Soviet Union (12 min. 35 sec.)
9. The death of Andrei Sakharov (7 min.)
10. Review of other events of the year (4 min.)

Whereas *Namedni* generally devoted between 30 sec. and 5 min. to each topic, *Staraia Kvartira* had longer sequences. The anchors discussed and evaluated historical events in a more detailed manner, presenting various conflicting viewpoints, stimulating debates and asking the audience questions. The last episode of the programme was supposed to be aired at

the very end of 1999, but the show was not cancelled. The makers of the programme realised that they had enough material to continue, and in 2000 the programme remained on the air, although in the slightly different format. The title was changed to *Novaia Staraia Kvartira* ('The new old flat', 2000–2002). The first version of *Staraia Kvartira* had transported its viewers in time to a certain year of the past in each episode, but in the new version the focus of each episode was not a year, but a date. Furthermore, although a live studio audience had played an important role in the original *Staraia Kvartira*, *Novaia Staraia Kvartira* did not have a live audience in the studio. In the new version, the 'hosts' occupied a 'private flat' and invited guests over, which led to a new spatial configuration: the guests shared their memories with each other and with the anchor while sitting comfortably on a couch.

A more detailed analysis of the programme in the following section may shed some light on the aspects that are most relevant to the discussion of mediated nostalgia.

Memory Space as Public Space in Staraia Kvartira

Space is central to the formation of memory. The space of a communal flat, as I have mentioned above, occupies a special place in the lives of many generations of Soviet citizens, and thus the choice of decorating a restaurant space, a theatre stage and a television studio as a communal flat strongly implies an intention to present life in the USSR through the eyes of individuals. The reconstruction of a communal flat in Petrovich permitted the conservation of material objects which otherwise would have ended up in a garbage bin. In the play *Pesni Nashei Kommunal'ki*, the interior of a communal flat framed the portrayal of the Soviet period through the culture of songs. In this section we will see how the space of a television studio decorated as a communal flat becomes important for the formation of collective memories. Using the concepts of collective memory, reenactment, witnessing and the public sphere, I will show how a 'nostalgic' television show becomes an important platform for understanding the present situation through the analysis of the past.

The set of the TV programme had the complex configuration of a space within a space. It was divided into two parts: the first was the stage, where the invited guests and the anchors had discussions, and the second was the auditorium, where the studio audience were seated. By this arrangement, the studio represented two essential spaces in the Soviet

cultural landscape: a communal flat and a Palace of Culture, placed one inside the other. Sitting in the audience in the Palace, people observed what went on in the flat, i.e. on stage. Meanwhile the television viewers observed both the action on stage and the reaction of the audience to whatever happened on stage. The stage was decorated as an old flat with its different areas – a dining room with old-fashioned furnishings, including a sofa, a table and a TV set with a traditional lace doily, and a kitchen with a stove, a shelf with jars and an old sink – in which ‘authentic’ objects from Soviet times played an important role in creating the atmosphere.

The kitchen space was a key element of this staged communal flat. Discussions, quarrels and celebrations, which took place in every Soviet kitchen, were played on stage. The kitchen was reenacted as a ‘public space’ – a social area where individuals discussed vital social and political problems. It became a discursive space where guests and hosts gathered to discuss matters of common interest – i.e. the Soviet past – and tried whenever possible to reach agreement and a common judgement. The screenwriter Viktor Slavkin has described how such a spatial arrangement influenced the character of the discussions: ‘In *Staraia Kvartira* we were confronted with people and situations that demanded sober judgement. But we were not in court, we were in a flat, in the kitchen, and the tone of the conversation was supposed to fit the conditions of the space’ (Slavkin *Otvetstvennyi kvartirovshchik*). During these ‘kitchen discussions’, the guests of the programme and anchors created a public sphere in which political participation was made possible through the medium of talk (Habermas 1991). The talk centred on a chronological narration of the past, starting from the early postwar years and ending in the present day. In this way the discussion of the Soviet past stimulated and formed a focus for political and cultural debates. Let me explain in some detail what I mean.

In the restaurant Petrovich, the chaotic collection of memories in material form functions as an atmospheric environment for indulging in ‘culinary nostalgia’. In the play *Pesni Nashei Kommunal'ki*, the kitchen of a communal flat functions as a special space enabling painful memories to surface and stories to be told through the medium of song. The stage of *Staraia Kvartira* is similarly decorated with conspicuous objects of Soviet consumer culture, forming a space for active remembering and dialogue between memories of discontent (i.e., memories connected with purges, prosecutions, incriminations and false accusations by average

Soviet citizens, political harassment, etc.) and positive memories (such as first love, buying a car, travelling, friendships, and so on).

Anatolii Malkin, the producer of the programme, insisted that the studio be made to look a bit shabby because it was supposed to resemble a Soviet Palace of Culture, and so make the feeling of time travel more 'tangible' (Malkin, 2010). Because many people have been to a Soviet *dom kultury* and many have sat in Soviet kitchens, the feeling of recognition of a familiar space was likely to strengthen memories of the past and initiate the process of remembering. Starting at the moment the guests walked on stage and the audience sat down, the process of remembering was further facilitated by a number of manoeuvres, some of which involved spatial configurations and objects while others involved the medium of television.

The connection of historical and present spaces in *Staraia Kvartira* made it possible to connect past and present times. This connection was facilitated by the metaphor of a door with several doorbells. The anchors invited the programme's guests on stage by ringing one of the doorbells. In Soviet times, a communal flat was home to many families, and a visitor had to ring the doorbell marked with the name of the person or family he or she wanted to visit. The television show is set inside the communal flat, but the door that the viewers and the audience see is the outer door with the doorbell buttons. Hence the viewers see both the inside and the outside of the flat. At the same time, the door leads to many more flats. In this way, the door connects *Staraia Kvartira* with other spaces: by opening the door an anchor in the programme could access any communal flat, and so link the events and experiences of one flat with many others. By means of this metaphor, many individual lives framed by the living conditions of communal flats and many shared experiences of the communist regime are woven into the complex tapestry of Soviet history.

Witnessing

Although the programme followed a script, which outlined the general sequence of events to be presented and the people invited to 'testify', it was a live show in which the unfolding of memories and events could take unexpected turns. A group of editors was responsible for finding interesting stories and people who could give their personal accounts of the events discussed in the programme's episodes (Kemarskaya 2012). Singly

or in groups, guests were invited onto the stage to present different versions of the same events.¹⁴

Like many other events, the fall of the Berlin Wall, which opened the second part of the episode about 1989, was presented through the eyes of the witnesses, people who had or claimed to have personal knowledge of the event concerned. In this episode, the anchors introduced two witnesses from two opposing camps to give their personal accounts of the events around the fall of the Berlin Wall: a Russian advisor to the Ambassador of the USSR in Berlin, Igor Maksimovich, and the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in Russia, Ernst-Jörg von Studnitz. The writer Viktor Slavkin read extracts from the available documents about the event and asked the guests to confirm or refute them. In addition to these two guests, the circle of witnesses was expanded to include people from the audience, both Russian and German, who were asked to share their experiences of that historic moment. This was done in order to bring together the 'official' version and that of 'ordinary people'. A piece of the Berlin Wall, brought to the programme by Ernst-Jörg von Studnitz, functioned as a 'silent witness of the greatest tragedy of the 20th century', as he called it. The presence of this bit of concrete confirmed that the Wall had fallen and the Cold War ended.

This episode exemplifies several categories of witnessing (Laub 1995, 61). One is witnessing oneself in an experience (that is, the guests bear witness to their individual experiences); the second is witnessing others giving testimony about the past; and the third is being a witness to the process of witnessing. The studio audience in the programme and the viewers of the programme become witnesses, both to the others giving testimony and to the whole process of witnessing, and witness themselves in their whole experience of witnessing the programme. The experience of witnessing is strengthened by the narrative strategy – the past events are narrated in present tense – which allows TV viewers to pretend that they are taking part in the events. To describe the moment, the anchors generally use such words as 'today', 'this month', and 'this year', constantly accentuating the remembered moment as 'present'.

Among the invited guests are well-known political figures, artists and actors, singers and activists, famous TV personalities and ordinary citizens, all of whom become equals on the stage of *Staraia Kvartira*. In the

¹⁴ The group of ten to twelve editors carefully selected guests for each episode. Each invited guest had to provide a photo.

episode about the Berlin Wall, two political figures who were out of reach of any Soviet citizen before sit right there in front of the audience, ready to engage in dialogue. In the episode about 1957, the Soviet singer Edita Piekha brings her celebrity figure closer to the understanding of average Russian and former Soviet citizens by telling about her personal life during the period, including memories of her family starving during the war, stories about living conditions and banalities of day-to-day life, and memories of the neighbours in her communal flat – all of which were no different from any ordinary person's stories.

The immediate witnesses of the events, including invited celebrities, average people and participants, enter into a dialogue with one other while observed by the 'immediate receivers of the testimonies', the television viewers (Laub 1995, 62). Both the anchors and the audience act as 'companions on the eerie journey of the testimonies' (Laub 1995, 62), present in the studio as participants in the 'reliving and re-experiencing of the event'. They 'become a part of the struggle to go beyond the event and not be submerged and lost in it' (Laub 1995, 62). Thus the time of the Soviet rule is represented in *Staraia Kvartira* in the form of a spectacular play of testimonies in which narrated life stories of Soviet and Russian ordinary people are tightly intertwined with the dramatic, tragic and comic events on the grand and the small scale.

The producer Anatolii Malkin states that the idea behind the programme was to portray events of which direct witnesses could be found (Malkin, Programma Peredach, 6 July, 2010). Malkin himself was born in 1946 and the programme starts with the year 1947, so that he was an indirect or potential witness of all the events presented in the programme, although he probably did not have personal memories of many of them. Like Parfenov, who uses similar strategy, Malkin tells his personal story and the stories of several generations of the Soviet people. His intention is to 'restore' the image of the life he himself lived. Nonetheless, like the starting date of 1961 for *Namedni*, 1947 represented the start of a new era in the Soviet Union. Viktor Slavkin explains the choice of the first year by arguing that 1947, when the monetary reform was launched and rationing ended, was when the Soviet people could finally feel the beginning of a transition from wartime to a civilian way of life, so that it makes sense to begin the narrative with a story about the new life.¹⁵ Again, as in *Namedni*, day-to-day life is the main focus of the programme, although in *Staraia*

¹⁵ See the interview at <http://www.peoples.ru/art/theatre/dramatist/slavkin/>.

Kvartira this focus is more profound and life stories are presented in more elaborate narratives presenting controversial and multiple interpretations. This profoundness is possible thanks to the strategy of reenactment that the makers of the programme chose.

Reenactment

The simulation of different life situations was a frequently used ‘time travel’ strategy in *Staraia Kvartira* – for a few minutes the anchors and the audience had to imagine that they live in another time by participating in staged performances. For example, in a story about the first cooperatives people ‘visited one of the newly opened public cafes’. The stage was then set as a small coffee place, called ‘Staraia Kvartira’, with waiters buzzing around. The anchor, in a half-joking, half-serious manner, discussed myths and realities of the first legal private business in Russia with a ‘capitalist shark’. While an entertaining conversation ensued, another performance was played in the studio audience: a middle-aged man walking between the rows tried to sell counterfeit jeans to members of the audience. The public reacted with laughter, and the cameras captured many individual expressions. The people’s smiles and nods confirmed that the reenacted scene was accurate.

As this example illustrates, the programme’s producers took full advantage of historical reenactment as a method whose central narrative is ‘one of conversion from ignorance to knowledge, individualism to sociability, resistance to compliance, and present to past’ (Agnew 2004, 330). The reenactment of different moments in the Soviet past offered people a kind of historical knowledge gained through physical experience. By being present and by actively participating in the staged activities, the audience and guests were involved in ‘body-based discourse in which the past is reanimated through physical and psychological experience’ (Agnew 2004, 330). The format of the programme allowed a reenactment of certain events in order to offer the audience a live experience to help them comprehend the complexity and conflicts of attitudes and behaviours in those turbulent years. Improvisation allowed for open-ended reenactment. For example, in the programme about 1953, the audience was engaged in a reenactment of Stalin’s funeral. The editorial director of the programme, Irina Kemarskaya, recounts that the effect was stunning as people really felt the strength of contradictory reactions and ambiguous

emotions and so came closer to understanding the general hysteria in the Soviet Union during Stalin's funeral (Kemarskaya 2012).

Another example is the episode about the *Mezhregionalnaia deputatskaia gruppa* ('Interregional group of deputies'), a democratic movement, and the second Congress of People's Deputies of the USSR (*Vtoroi S"ezd narodnykh deputatov SSSR*). In this episode, two former deputies, Iurii Boldirev and Arkadii Murashev, reenact a political debate in which they discussed political events that took place in 1989. The discussion is centred on the consequences of the revolutions of 1989 to 1991 in Europe and the overwhelming disappointment that followed the first wave of enthusiasm. In the discussion, the speakers and members of the audience describe themselves as 'naive', 'idealists' and 'dreamers' who believed in the new democratic reforms and radical economic changes which were supposed to lead to an immense growth in the country's prosperity. According to them, in 1989 there was a strong belief in revolution and a great trust in Yeltsin's democrats. Ten years later, in 1999 (the year when the episode was filmed and aired), these beliefs and hopes had disappeared, and disappointment, disillusion and frustration with the current situation became the dominant attitudes. By 1999, the majority of the population were still waiting for the rights and opportunities promised by the government, but nothing of the kind was forthcoming. The effect of the reenacted debates and the involvement of people who were politically active in 1989 to 1991 was apparently very strong. One woman in the audience said that talking about her memories of participation in the demonstrations made her relive the same emotions and feelings of hope. Open talk about the past and the reenactment of the debates facilitated an act of emotional connection between those who were trying to remember the epoch under scrutiny (Agnew 2004). Through this emotional reconnection, it became possible to come to terms with the past and find a kind of reconciliation.

Reconciliation

In *Staraia Kvartira*, humorous episodes about the day-to-day lives of Soviet citizens are followed by heartbreaking encounters with people who have gone through tragic experiences such as the aftermath of the Afghanistan war. The war resulted in losses of many young men and in a subsequent amnesia in regard to the tragedies brought about by the military conflict. Forgetting and the inability to forget became the central

themes of this episode: in spite of the official statement that no Russian soldier was left behind on Afghan soil, there were many instances of Soviet soldiers who had not returned to their families. The Committee of 'Afghan' Mothers (*Komitet Afganskikh Materei*) pointed to incidents and atrocities that happened long after the war had ended, and to constant discrimination against and lack of respect for the veterans.

The emotional climax of the sequence about the Afghanistan war is the moment when General Boris Gromov, who had been responsible for the withdrawal of Soviet troops, comes on stage. The presence of the two opposing camps – the veterans' mothers and the general – resulted in a confrontation of the general by the mourning women, who stated that if the nation does not deal properly with the memory of the war, history would repeat itself. (In fact, when that conversation took place, the second Chechen War of 1999–2009 was already in progress.) The mothers who had lost their children, with no public space to express their concerns, felt an imperative to tell their stories and to be heard. *Staraia Kvartira* provided such a mediated public space where they could talk openly to a large audience and meet representatives of the opposing camp – the state – which they blamed for forcing the Afghanistan war into the periphery of oblivion. Meeting and talking with General Gromov on the set of *Staraia Kvartira* about the tragedy of losing children became a much-needed moment of reconciliation, and culminated in the audience, invited guests and anchors singing together in commemoration of the dead. Collective singing and shared meals were symbolical moments in the programme in which people with conflicting positions could join together. In these moments, the anchors played a crucial role as mediators, initiating and assisting the process of reconciliation, and actively contributing to the creation of a meaningful picture of the past and present.

During the show's first years on the air, there was one main anchor, Grigorii Gurvich, who tried to bring people's emotions and conflicting memories into focus. He had the task of keeping the process of remembering going while retaining an objective position. His appearance helped him in this task: an unprepossessing face and exterior and a speech impediment encouraged people to trust him with their secrets. His aura was neighbourly rather than that of a celebrity. His humorous improvisations smoothed and relieved some difficult questions, providing opportunities to find fair answers: Gurvich 'improvised, colouring each

episode with his humour, unexpected thoughts, subtle philosophical remarks' (Slavkin, *Otvetstvennyi kvartiros"emshchik*). However, memories could not always prove to be 'central to the pursuit of justice' (Booth 2006, ix). Often individual memories and experiences were incompatible with the continuation of the reconciliation process:

People who come on stage usually bring up memories and secrets accumulated over the years.... Someone wants to defend himself; someone wants to restore truth. For me restoration of justice was the most important task of the programme [...]. However, sometimes I could not reconcile people [...]. Especially when *Staraia Kvartira* lived through the 1930s, or the unforgettable 1953 [i.e. Stalin's death]. For some this moment was a light in the end of the tunnel, while for some it was genuine mourning. And I realised that it was impossible to reconcile these people. Much can be reconciled, but this cannot be. (Gurvich, *Ot starogo podvala do staroi kvartiry*)

Staraia Kvartira was intended not only to reconcile people with different positions, but also to bring together different generations in order to prevent the forgetting of unpleasant past events and to facilitate understanding between parents, children and grandchildren on difficult historical moments. People who wanted to participate in the programme were asked to come in multigenerational families: a grandmother was to bring along her grandson and they would both 'relive' the past by participating in the reenactments: the representatives of the younger generations were supposed to 'witness' the events of the past. In that respect the figure of Grigorii Gurvich was essential to the overall concept of the programme:

Grisha led discussions about distant events as if he had witnessed them and even taken part in them. It was not only because of his broad erudition and education. He perceived history very personally; he knew that he is a child of that history, and everything that had happened before him is a part of his biography and had a direct relation to him. Especially what happened in the country where he was born. That is why he so enthusiastically asked for details about particular events, and people felt that he was not indifferent to them and their troubles. That is why they were open and frank with him. (Slavkin, *Otvetstvennyi kvartiros"emshchik*)

Gurvich's self-image as a part of a larger entity (i.e., his country) and a global historical process which influenced his life and shaped his identity as an individual and a citizen served as an example of how to deal with the difficult past. Nonetheless, not everyone saw him as an ideal mediator of the past. As one of the programme's makers recalls, there were several incidents in which viewers expressed their reluctance to accept Grigorii Gurvich as the mediator of their collective memories and experience, and asked to have someone else replace him as the anchor: "Some 'good' viewers wrote to us: 'Why is a Jew telling us how it was to live in a communal flat?'" (Marusev 2013). Oleg Marusev reveals that the producer became afraid the programme would be cancelled, and in order to prevent that, and to keep the ratings high, he invited another anchor, a non-Jewish Russian. With the second anchor, Oleg Marusev, the process of facilitated collective remembering suddenly took an unexpected turn. Being of different generations and different backgrounds, the two anchors expressed discordant interpretations of the events, so that heated debates between the two anchors spilled onto the screen. Behind the apparently staged confrontation between the anchors was a 'human conflict', a conflict of different positions. Oleg Marusev insists that the confrontation between him and Gurvich was not scripted, intended to chain the audiences to the screen in order to increase the ratings (Marusev 2013). On the contrary, it was unexpected. He describes this situation as the first conflict of its kind on Russian television. According to him, up to then (presumably in Soviet times), several anchors usually shared each other's opinions.

Even in the programme *Vzgliad* ('Opinion'), different anchors in conflict shared the same 'civil position' and merely had different views on how to solve a problem. But the situation in which two anchors had conflicting opinions is, in Marusev's view, unusual and somehow not quite right for the television medium. Marusev's and Gurvich's confrontation was rooted in their understanding and evaluation of the historical period. For example, their opinions were dramatically divided on the question of the Baikal–Amur Mainline. Gurvich described this ambitious Soviet state project as a railway leading nowhere that destroyed many lives. Marusev believed that the construction of the railway line was associated with many positive memories of happy lives, love stories and youth. Apparently, the programme's crew were not ready for such a radical opposition between the anchors, so that the episode in which they

fight over how the Soviet epoch should be remembered was suppressed. However, the producer Anatolii Malkin ultimately decided to retain the two anchors with their conflict of opinions, which somehow softened with time.

What does this story tell us? Even though the programme was intended to show how the truth about the past was born in a process of dialogue, conflicting opinions were only feasible between guests or between guests and anchors. Among themselves, the anchors of the television programme had to present a unified point of view. Their task was to facilitate a discussion between the guests and the audience, who could argue between each other while the crew stayed above the discourse, providing an authority which was not to be doubted. This shows that the representations of the past are dependent on the internal processes of its production, such as the relations between the editors, anchors, producers and screenwriters.

The Mediated Soviet Past

In the examples given, I have illustrated how different media were used to construct an image of the Soviet past. In the television show *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* and in the two plays *Pesni Nashego Dvora* and *Pesni Nashei Kommunal'ki*, the musical heritage of the Soviet period served as a source of inspiration and as 'building blocks' of a portrait of life in the Soviet Union. In *Namedni*, Leonid Parfenov uses a wide variety of archived media content, including clips from dramatic, newsreel and documentary, cartoon and propaganda films, to help an older group of viewers revisit their past experiences and to educate a younger group about the history of their country and the life of their ancestors.

In the programme *Staraia Kwartira*, old Soviet media such as newsreels, film clips, radio reportages, newspapers and journals functioned not only as important sources of information about the past but also as a morphogenetic element. According to the screenwriter Viktor Slavkin, articles from the popular Soviet literary and political journal *Ogoniok*, one of the oldest Russian illustrated weekly magazines, formed the thematic core of the programme. Topics were selected for discussion based on the contents of the magazine. The magazine *Ogoniok* was chosen since it dealt with a variety of subjects every year: politics, technology, dance, fashion – everything, in Slavkin's opinion, that comprises the 'drama of life', in which banality and tragedy coexist (Slavkin, *Programma Peredach*, July

6, 2010). In its ambition to reflect different aspects of Soviet life, the representation of the epoch was somewhat similar to that in *Namedni*: the anchors and the viewers examined not only politics, but also the trivialities of life. Almost every episode of *Staraia Kvartira* started with a newsreel and/or a reading from the political newspaper *Pravda*, the main printed mass medium and the most influential publication in the Soviet Union, which provided an initial approach to what happened during the year in question. Newsreels shown before the discussion of each topic functioned as a reminder and a teaser: a familiar televised image from the past was an appetiser which usually portrayed only one side of the story and served as a starting point. Like *Namedni*, which used the same strategy of stimulating memory processes, *Staraia Kvartira* used the remediation of Soviet reality as the starting point for a debate in which the commonly televised Soviet myths were deconstructed through the testimonies of witnesses and the resulting conversations with the audience. From a more technical point of view, the newsreels and film clips screened above the stage played a twofold role. First, as a background for the discussions and illustrations accompanying the conversations on stage, they marked the fact that the discussions were in fact about the past: these newsreels were media of the past that narrated that past to the viewers. Second, newsreels and clips shown in the simulated milieu of a Soviet palace of culture potentially reproduced the past experience of watching newsreels in Soviet cinemas and in the screening rooms of Soviet palaces of culture, reinforcing the immediacy of the historical experience.¹⁶ Thus the programme used Soviet media to frame the process of remembering, both in the choice of topics for discussion and in organising the narration. Soviet mass media functioned as an important stimulus to help people begin remembering the events of the year under scrutiny.

Nostalgia in Staraia Kvartira

In a show about television that aired on Channel 5 in 2010, *Programma Peredach* ('Broadcast schedule'), the journalist Svetlana Sorokina says that *Staraia Kvartira* was among the programmes which 'affected the fate of

¹⁶ Before film screenings, Soviet cinemas usually showed short newsreels called *kinozhurnal* (cinematic journals) which presented news about political, cultural, economic and social developments in the Soviet states. This practice continued until the collapse of the USSR.

Russia' and had great influence on 'the founding of Russian television' (Sorokina 2010). A voice off-screen adds that, at the time when life was changing dramatically, people living in private flats, or living private lives in the communal flats which still existed in many cities, suddenly felt a nostalgia for 'cosy communal flats'.¹⁷ Hence the programme was one of the 'manifestations of nostalgia' and was designed to satisfy people's nostalgic longing. The broadcast did not define the word 'nostalgia', apparently assuming that everyone understood its meaning. Yet notions of what nostalgia means differ even among the makers of the programme. To the producer, Anatolii Malkin, nostalgia means a longing for one's 'own youth and experiences' connected to it, while to the anchor Oleg Marusev nostalgia means longing for 'one's homeland' (Malkin, *Programma Peredach*, July 6, 2010; Marusev 2013). In Malkin's definition, the object of nostalgia is somebody's private life; in Marusev's, it is an abstract image of a country.

The discourse in *Programma Peredach* illustrates that nostalgia was an emotional trend which was structured by a process of mediation through various cultural forms: '*Staraia Kvartira* was not the only television programme in which nostalgia was manifested or expressed' (Sorokina, *Programma Peredach*, July 6, 2010). Other such programmes included *Starie Pesni o Glavnom* and *Starii Televisor*. The nostalgic tendency was thus manifested across a wide spectrum of television programmes. When the *feeling of nostalgia* took on a certain cultural form, it could 'satisfy' the emotional demands of an audience who already experienced nostalgic sentiments. These sentiments seemed to be directed towards a reflective remembering of the past and towards a desire both to make sense of the past and to come to terms with the reality of the 1990s. That is why the nostalgia we might find in *Staraia Kvartira* is devoid of the glamour that had become so characteristic of nostalgia by the time *Programma Peredach* was broadcast. Nostalgia in *Staraia Kvartira* was of the type that Svetlana Boym has termed 'reflective', and functions as an alarm calling people to contemplate the past and their identities, signalling important changes in the political life of the country. In this perspective, *Staraia Kvartira* was one of the programmes which responded to social and cultural trends. By putting the unofficial history of the Soviet Union in the spotlight (recounting history through the lens of individual experiences) and reflecting on it from the standpoint of today, the makers

¹⁷ The trend away from communal flats began in the 1960s.

of the programme questioned why the revolution of 1991 was suddenly forgotten, and how that turn began to influence the Russian collective identity. Svetlana Boym wrote that it is revolution that produces nostalgia: 'the revolutionary epoch of *perestroika* and the end of the Soviet Union produced an image of the last Soviet decades as a time of stagnation, or alternatively, as a Soviet golden age of stability' (Boym 2001, xvi). Indeed, the tough rules of the market economy, a gradual loss of the benefits that had been provided by the Soviet system in the form of free higher education, decent pensions and free medical care, failed economic reforms, wars in Chechnya and the continuing winding-down of democratic transformations led to increased sympathy for the Communist Party, which secured a parliamentary majority in the 1995 elections. These elections, along with Yeltsin's 1993 assault on the White House in Moscow, signalled that the revolution was over and that Russian society was gradually moving towards more authoritarian and conservative tendencies. In this sense, the choice to finish the episode about 1989 with the death of Andrei Sakharov, the prominent human rights activist and well-known Soviet academic, made his death a symbol of the death of the revolution in 1999. In 1989 the Soviet period was nearing its end, while in 1999 the new period of restoration was ongoing (Shevtsova, 1999). In their discussion of the atmosphere of late *perestroika* and the new democratic revolutions taking place in Europe, the participants in *Staraia Kvartira* talked more about the present than about the past. Reflections about the past became an essential background for their evaluation of the contemporary situation and the demise of revolution and revolutionary ideas in Russia. What they were actually discussing was the process of restoration which took place after 1995 (Shevtsova, 1999). The 'nostalgic' remembering of day-to-day life in the Soviet Union, spiced with warm and entertaining memories about peculiar practices and events, concealed an important inner discourse. It was the discourse about the loss of a revolution which was supposed to lead the Russian people not only to a prosperous life, but also to a democratic society with functioning governmental institutions – something they had waited for and wanted so long, and had been fighting for in 1989–1991.

5.2. Nostalgia on Television in the 2000s

Florian Fosatto wrote that, after Vladimir Putin's re-election in 2004, Russian national television became 'reminiscent of Soviet television of the 1970s, huge technological changes notwithstanding' (Fosatto 2006, 4). After Putin came to power, freedom of the mass media declined and the government seized control of the content and style of television programmes (Hutchings and Rulyova 2009). From this moment on, the Kremlin

Encourages television to inform the public of the new social norms, underlining the necessity to use, besides sanitised news, the whole range of other formats available to the television medium, from analytical programmes commenting the news, to entertainment in its various forms, to sport. The goal is to help viewers understand the new rules of societal behaviour and acquire a sense of unity and pride after the 1990s (Fosatto 2006, 9–10)

The Kremlin was seeking legitimacy for its political, social and economic course by trying to sustain the image of stability 'that supports a new sense of national identity and creates an emotional link of continuity with the past, with Russia's imperial past as well as with the Soviet era, particularly with the 1970s', which according to the opinion polls was considered the most stable period in Russian history (Fosatto 2006, 10). To succeed in this endeavour, the media managers of federal channels were 'engaged in an exercise aimed at reproducing firmly shared past national mythologies through a range of broadcasts in which emotional tones, particularly those leaning toward nationalist rhetoric, clearly outweigh the importance of information accuracy' (Fosatto 2006, 10).

Nationalism takes the place of communist ideology as its messages are built upon familiar images and themes, the strongest of which are ideas of homecoming and belonging. 'Nationalist ideology ... offers a comforting collective biography instead of a flawed individual story full of estrangements and disappointments; it promises to recover the blessed childhood of a nation, without the alienation and loss experienced in adult years' (Boym 1995, X). In 2005, the media coverage of celebrations of the Great Patriotic War (i.e., World War II) reached unprecedented amplitude, with films, talk shows and documentaries celebrating patriotism, and it was obvious that the Kremlin was putting enormous effort into creating

national unity based on the collective memories of the war. At that time, the Levada Centre's public opinion surveys showed that 86 per cent of respondents saw the victory over Nazi Germany in the Great Patriotic War as the main event in Russian history (Levada 2005). Russian television in the period from 2000 to 2013 was overwhelmed with reruns of films, documentaries and TV series presenting different aspects of life in the USSR. Naturally the number of programmes and series produced during the last ten years – including screen adaptations such as *Deti Arbata* (Andrei Eshpai, 2004), *Moskovskaia Saga* (Dmitrii Barshchevskii, 2004), *Zhizn' i sud'ba* (Sergei Ursuliak, 2012) and *Stilyagi* (Valery Todorovsky, 2009), and soap operas such as *Staraia Kvartira* (2011–present) and many others – is far greater than the number analysed in this section. Nevertheless, to the extent that space allows, I will try to paint an objective picture; that is, to indicate the dominant tendencies using the available material. For that reason, I will focus in this section on a presentation of the niche channel *Nostalgia*, which broadcasts reruns, and on the two documentary programmes *Nasha Gordost* ('Our pride', NTV 2011), and *Legendi SSSR* ('The legends of the USSR', REN TV 2012) in order to illustrate what had changed in the representations of the Soviet period by the late 2000s in comparison with the 1990s.

5.2.1 The *Nostal'giia* Channel in a Nutshell¹⁸

During the past twenty years, non-fiction historical programmes and vintage films and TV shows have been seen more frequently on television (Gray and Bell 2013). As early as 1985, American viewers could enjoy old films and shows by subscribing to 'The Nostalgia Channel'. Thanks to the Internet channel 'GoodTV', many can now watch American classics from the time 'when television was good' (<http://www.goodtv.com/>). However, channels broadcasting reruns of old news programmes, films and television shows produced by the old broadcasting networks are still rare. In this section I will shed some light on the Russian niche channel *Nostal'giia*, exploring the reasons behind the creation of such a channel and setting it in relation to the growing trend of nostalgia for the Soviet period in Russia. I will first briefly describe the channel and its audience, and give an example of a day's programming schedule, before undertaking an analysis and finally summarising my findings.

¹⁸ The reasons behind the creation of the channel have been explored in Kalinina (2014).

The Russian niche channel *Nostal'giia* (Vladimir Ananich, director; Mikhail Galich, first editor) first went on the air November 4, 2004. The channel broadcasts in Russia and countries with sizeable Russian minorities, including Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Azerbaijan and the USA, and is available for subscription via cable and satellite TV networks (NTV Plus in Russia, Russkii Mir in the rest of the world). According to the producers, the channel's audience is diverse and includes viewers of various generations. The older age groups, those born in the 1950 to the 1970s, watch the *Nostal'giia* channel because it reminds them of their youth and adventures, while the younger age groups are fascinated by the aesthetics of the past and curious about the history of their country. Vladimir Ananich nonetheless admits that the channel is popular mainly among men aged 40 to 60 who 'plunge into nostalgic journeys to their youth while drinking some vodka on a lonely Friday evening' (Ananich 2013).

The *Nostal'giia* channel is of particular interest for memory and media studies because it was the first channel in the world to begin imitating daily television broadcasts of the 1970s and '80s (and now, increasingly, the 1990s as well). That is to say, the channel's producers have reproduced the schedule of a broadcasting day and attempted to schedule the original shows, from morning until evening, in the order that was once typical of Soviet Central Television (*Tsentralnoe Televidenie*). In addition to vintage films, talk shows and music shows, *Nostalgia* broadcasts news programmes and even weather forecasts from the period. Besides broadcasting programmes found in the State Archive of Radio and Television, the channel also shows contemporary documentaries and talk shows in which invited guests and anchors discuss events that took place in the Soviet period. These shows and documentaries are produced especially for the channel.

Nostal'giia Sells: Economic Reasons behind Reruns

One should bear in mind that, by the time the channel first went on the air, televised nostalgia for the Soviet period was already an established trend and Russian television was broadcasting many talk shows and documentaries which revisited the Soviet past (*Namedni: Nasha Era 1961–1991*; *Starii Televisor, Staraia Kvartira, Starie Pesni o Glavnom* – all of these programmes were broadcast on central Russian television channels such as Channel 1, Rossiia and NTV in 1995–2002). Hence it

comes as little surprise that by 2003 the idea of launching a channel dedicated to Soviet films and reruns of Soviet programmes and newsreels was, in the words of the producers, ‘in the pipeline’. The channel simply followed the trend of growing commercialisation of the recent past as the symbolic universe of the Soviet Union gained aesthetic and commercial value, both in visual and in material culture. At that time, Russian television had much to offer its viewers in this respect, but could not yet provide a whole day of non-stop content to evoke nostalgic sentiments. Many Soviet films were already available on DVD, but it was still difficult for an average viewer to find copies of vintage TV programmes or televised theatre plays. That is why the broadcasting of archived Soviet media material was a huge step in popularising Soviet media across the vast territory of Russia and the former Soviet Union. Today *Nostalgia* is no longer the only channel entirely dedicated to reruns of Soviet television content: more recently, the channel *Retro* was launched to tap the seemingly vast viewer demand. According to the producer of the *Nostal’giia* channel, *Retro* receives state funding and has much greater resources than the privately owned *Nostalgia*, which enable it to provide diverse and expensive content (Ananich 2013).

Table 1: Programme, November 26, 2013

06:00	<i>Programma A</i> [Music and song festivals in Sweden and Italy], 1990
07:00	<i>Rozhdennye v SSSR</i> [‘Born in the USSR’, talk show]
08:05	<i>Eti Neveroiatnye Muzykanti</i> [‘Those unbelievable musicians’, music programme], 1977
09:10	<i>Muzyka i my</i> [‘Music and us’, music programme], 1987
10:20	<i>Ptichii polet</i> [‘Bird’s flight’, film], 1990
12:00	<i>Do 16 i starshe</i> [‘Up to 16 and older’, youth programme], 1991
12:50	<i>Nostal’giia po Tashkentu</i> [‘Nostalgia for Tashkent’, documentary], 2011
13:40	<i>Dva dnia v nachale dekabria</i> [‘Two days in early December’, film], 1981
15:00	<i>Vremia</i> [‘Time’, news programme]

16:00	<i>Rozhdennye v SSSR</i> ['Born in the USSR', talk-show]
17:00	<i>Tvorcheskii vecher kompozitora A. Pakhmutovoi</i> ['The creative evening of the composer Alexandra Pakhmutova, Part 1], 1975
18:00	<i>Elita strany Sovietov</i> ['The elite of the Soviet country']
18:50	<i>Zolotaia Plastinka-2</i> ['Gold Record 2', concert film], 1983
19:30	<i>Chelovek so Storony</i> ['The man from the other side', televised theatre play, Part 1], 1973
20:45	<i>Spokoinoi Nochi, Malyshei</i> ['Good night, little ones', children's evening programme]
21:00	<i>Vremia</i> ['Time', news programme]
22:00	<i>Rozhdennye v SSSR</i> ['Born in the USSR', talk show, live]
23:00	<i>Tvorcheskii vecher kompozitora A. Pakhmutovoi</i> ['The creative evening of the composer Alexandra Pakhmutova', Part 2], 1975
00:00	<i>Bylo vremia</i> ['There was a time', information and analysis], 2008
01:00	<i>Kabachok 13 stol'ev</i> ['The pub with 13 chairs', entertainment programme], 1978
02:15	<i>Vecher pamiati Vysotskogo</i> ['Evening in memory of Vladimir Vysotskii', concert, premiere], 1988
04:00	<i>Proshchal'nye gastrol'i</i> ['Farewell tour', film], 1992
05:10	<i>Vechernie melodii</i> [Evening melodies, film concert], 1985

(Source: <http://www.nostalgiatv.ru/programs?day=2013-11-26>)

According to the producers, the choice of content to broadcast depends on several factors: the condition and availability of the preserved programmes; whether broadcast rights can be obtained for the archive material; and the price. Among the content that the producers would like to broadcast – whether for reasons of interest or ideology – it is ultimately technical and economic factors that determine the selection.

Usually, reruns of previously broadcast content are used to fill time slots when a channel cannot supply new programming. This is what many

channels in Russia were doing in the 1990s, for obvious economic reasons (Weispfenning 2003). 'Economically, rerun programming is a necessity for television broadcasters and cable channels.... Airing episodes multiple times allows the industry to stretch its programme investments' (Fergusson and Eastman 2002, 17). Making new programmes is much more expensive than rerunning existing shows or films. Apparently, screening archive material used to be a very good investment: for a small amount of money, a channel could secure its broadcasting time by filling in time slots with content which the viewers were more likely to appreciate. But with time and with the growing demand for archived television content, the prices have gone up, making it more difficult for small private channels to buy it.¹⁹ Reruns are attractive to channels because 'media companies prefer to control economic risk by using actors, stories, or programmes that have a track record of past success' (Weispfenning 2003, 166). As the producers of the *Nostal'giia* channel had taken notice of the popularity of the Soviet visual culture by 2003, their choice of content is understandable. According to scholarly research, audiences accept repeat broadcasts several times (Weispfenning 2003, 166), for several reasons. Burke wrote about 'a recurrent pleasure' of art which occurs because 'the audience knows both the desires and resolution, and compensates for the loss of novelty' (quoted in Weispfenning 2003, 167). The communication scholars Diane Furno-Lamude and James Anderson found that nostalgia played an important role in explaining the attraction of television reruns. Their research has shown that viewers watched reruns 'because it reminded them of their past, it reminded them of when they were younger and watched the programme, they liked the programme in the past, they wanted to look for different things, and ... wanted to be reminded of the ending' (Diane Furno-Lamude and James Anderson 1992 quoted in Weispfenning 2003, 167). The director of the *Nostal'giia* channel, Vladimir Ananich, expresses the belief that the viewers are fascinated with the content of the channel because it reminds them of when they were young: '*Nostalgia* does not reminisce about the past; it is about recalling the time when you were young. But it is a channel created in such a way that makes it pleasant to remember how young we were' (Ananich 2013). Ananich says that watching old news programmes can remind people

¹⁹ For example, Stream TV runs a 'Retro-TV' channel that broadcasts films, documentaries, humour and music programmes, TV series and televised theatre plays from many countries.

about important periods in their lives. Historic events shown on television function as important markers to activate their personal memories: ‘Why rerun the *Vremia* programme? Because when you watch the news programme *Vremia*, you automatically identify with that time. You start counting: How old was I at that time? While this freak was talking, I was listening to the Voice of America’ (Ananich 2013). From this perspective, nostalgia for one’s youth and childhood, stimulated by familiar media of the past, lead to a complex process of recalling one’s personal life through the context of a whole epoch. However, some people saw the *Nostal’giia* channel and those who watch it as an indication of some kind of psychological illness.

Table 2: The *Nostal’giia* Channel’s Own Productions

Name of the programme	Type of programme	Broadcasting time	Programme content
‘Born in the USSR’	Interactive talk show	Mon.–Thurs. 22:00	Talk show with celebrities
‘Before and after’	Journalism, talk show	Sat. 18:00	History of 1957–1991
‘Past time’	Archived news programme	Daily 21:00	The day in historical perspective, 1960–1990
‘There was a time’	News magazine; talk show with changing hosts	Sun. 21:00	Detailed discussions of events of the last 30 years of the USSR. Award-winning thematic programme.
‘Time tube’	Talk show	Fri. 21:00	Ironical recollection of the best aspects of Soviet life
‘Elovaia Submarina’	Talk show	Irregular	Talk show: History of Russian rock

'No Comment'			Short Soviet documentaries
'100 days'	Documentary	September 17–December 26, 2011	100 short documentary films about the collapse of the Soviet Union
'Beatlemania'	Talk show		Talk about the Beatles
'SevAlogia'	News magazine		
'Let's sing, friends!'	Music programme, talk show		Memories about songs
'Musical nostalgia'	Music programme		Hits of the 1960s–1990s
'After "Beat Club" and "Music Magazine"'	Music programme		Archives of West German music programmes
'Melodies and rhythms born in the USSR'	Music digest		Live programmes of the Soviet period
'Photo album'			Heroes tell their biographies through photo albums

Functions of the Channel:

Creating a Temporal Continuum and a Link between Generations

In an interview, Mikhail Galich stated that one of the main reasons for creating the channel was to provide an understanding of a certain continuation of historical processes:

The link between the times was broken, so we wanted to restore this continuity. In our minds everything was disconnected. There is *sovok*, then perestroika, and now there is another global stagnation. When

we started the channel, there was a very distinct feeling of a broken time continuum. We lived in another country, a different society, and the attempt to understand the present, to find our roots, to understand that we have the same background played an important role. (Galich 2013)

The function of providing a coherent narrative of the Soviet past was mainly fulfilled by the numerous documentaries and talk shows produced by the channel. Alexander Lipnitski, the author of the programme about Russian rock music *Elovaia Submarina*, has said that function of his programme is to preserve and pass on knowledge about creative individuals who were active during the late socialist period and about the unique culture of that time (Lipnitski 2013). Such talk shows also fulfilled an important function in the process of remembering: they staged discussions that allowed different voices and opinions to be heard, inviting representatives of different political camps to express oppositional views and thereby illustrating the complexity of the period.

Alongside recordings of party congresses, the channel shows concerts of many Western bands, thus mixing content that was available on Soviet television with material that was not accessible through legal channels during the late socialist period. In so doing, the channel presents a version of television that many people who lived during that period would have wanted to watch. It is an alternative version of Soviet television in which popular films produced in the USSR are followed by concerts of bands one could only listen to in the USSR by smuggling records or making home recordings, followed by serious talk shows in which witnesses of past events discuss different aspects of life in the Soviet Union.

At the same time, the channel creates a link between larger groups of individuals by broadcasting not only in Russia, but also across the former Soviet republics and the USA, thus uniting people who were separated by the political events of the early 1990s. These people's individual memories are stimulated by social points of reference which the channel produces in the form of reruns. The broadcasts allow people to learn about themselves and share this knowledge with younger generations. The reruns become 'a form of visual record that locates collective memory in a fixed form, although not in a fixed space' (Weispenning 2003, 170). Thus the channel can provide cross-generational information, collective memory and social continuity.

Restorative and Reflexive Nostalgia

In *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), Svetlana Boym divides nostalgia into two types, 'restorative' and 'reflective', where 'restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* and attempts a trans-historical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming – wistfully, ironically, desperately' (Boym 2001, xiii). While restorative nostalgia conceives itself not as nostalgia but as tradition, protecting a kind of absolute truth, reflective nostalgia casts doubt upon truths and traditions, leaving space for contradictions. 'If restorative nostalgia ends up reconstructing emblems and rituals of homes and homeland in an attempt to conquer and spatialise time, reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalises space' (Boym 2011, 455). Boym argues that 'restorative nostalgia is at the core of recent national and religious revivals. It knows two main plots – the return to origins and conspiracy' (Boym 2001, xviii). Reflective nostalgia on the other hand makes it possible 'to distinguish between national memory that is based on a single plot of national identity, and social memory, which consists of collective frameworks that mark but do not define the individual memory' (Boym 2001, xviii).

This dual nature of nostalgia is important to remember when calling something nostalgic. Looking back at the past with the aim of revisiting it does not necessarily involve a desire to return the former state of affairs. It might actually mean the start of an important process not only of recollecting and reworking of past traumas, but also of understanding what occurs in the present and how to conceive one's own position among others. In other words, reflective nostalgia about the past contributes to the construction of viewers' cultural and collective identities. When it comes to defining what nostalgia is and whether one can consider the channel 'nostalgic', the interviews reveal the difficulty of arriving at a common understanding of the term itself. The producers referred to a duality of nostalgia similar to Boym's dichotomy, and made a rather clear distinction between reflective nostalgia on their channel and restorative nostalgia elsewhere on television. According to Ananich, one may be nostalgic for the time of youth, and this is the type of nostalgia the channel feeds. At the same time, the producers stress that, although it broadcasts the Soviet shows, the channel is not calling for the restoration of the previous ideology or political order:

Ananich: Compared to your official [i.e., federally controlled] channels, *Nostal'giia* is a super-dissident channel.

Galich: If you switch on the programme *Vremia*, you will see that we show the present; that we often show what happens in the future.

Ananich: *Nostal'giia* is not a channel that repeats the old ideology. The way it is programmed allows the presence of dissidents. Do you think that we could see what the Rolling Stones or the Doors looked like back then? Now it is possible not only to hear them, but also to watch them. And during that time, dissidents were not present on television. (*Telekhranitel'*, July 6, 2008)

The producers consider talk shows on the channel to be devoid of any nostalgic sentiments. When it comes to comparing their own work with other similar efforts, they clearly draw a line between 'us' and 'them'. They believe that talk shows on the *Nostal'giia* channel, compared with programmes such as *Staraia Kvartira*, which in their opinion was 'absolutely nostalgic', do not propagate life in the Soviet Union as a positive experience, but try to understand the course of events and take a critical attitude towards the past (Ananich 2013; Galich 2013). Remarkably, the show *Staraia Kvartira*, which was broadcast on Russian television in the mid 1990s, was a talk show in which the anchors, together with the audience, tried to come to terms with the past through a process of collective remembering, and hardly described life in the Soviet Union as a positive experience. It is true that certain aspects of life in Soviet times were reviewed in *Staraia Kvartira* with a positive, although often ironic, attitude, but this was done to show the complexity of life rather than to express any longing to return to that period. The same can be said about the *Nostal'giia* channel. The producers of *Nostal'giia* amplify the differences between *Staraia Kvartira* and their channel's talk shows in spite of the obvious similarities between them and between the attitudes they express towards the Soviet past.

Defining what nostalgia is becomes even more difficult when Mikhail Galich says that any look backward to the past is nostalgic. He believes that switching on the *Nostal'giia* channel to watch an old film is in itself an 'act of nostalgia', even 'nostalgia in its purest form' (Ananich 2013; Galich 2013). However, a new documentary or a talk show in which the past is *discussed* is no longer nostalgic; it is an analysis of the past. Thus, he believes, nostalgia is not a reflective act of thinking, but an emotional

urge to go back to the past. In this light he sees the *Nostal'giia* channel as a remedy for those who are nostalgic; in other words, those who harbour utopian dreams about the past and wish for its return. According to Galich, the channel did not have any content that could be called nostalgic; it was the users who experienced nostalgia – after all, they were the ones switching on their TV sets. However, after switching on the TV, according to Galich's logic, nostalgia is supposed to disappear because the channel's programmes show 'how the past really was'. Galich says restorative nostalgia, which is now back on the agenda, 'is not correct; it is ideologised and mythologised. Today our role has actually changed; we destroy the myths that are being built. We show how it was in reality' (Galich 2013).

Both Vladimir Ananich and Mikhail Galich saw nostalgia on other Russian television channels and in other programmes that are similar to the productions of the *Nostal'giia* channel. In such cases, they often understood nostalgia as favouring a restoration of the Soviet political rhetoric and discourses. By contrast, they saw their own work as educational and journalistic, compared to 'all other' programmes, which were produced 'in order to call for nostalgic emotions'. Their work thus became an important marker of their identity, as well as of the channel's identity among communication networks in Russia. The implication is that, after watching the programmes on the channel, one would be more knowledgeable about the past and give up any dreams of restoring it.

Like the listeners to the radio programme, the producers of the *Nostal'giia* channel see those who experience restorative nostalgia as 'sick', unable to cope with the present reality. This view conforms to the understanding of nostalgia as a psychological illness: an incapability to cope with contemporary day-to-day life. They believe there are masses 'out there' who consume media content without critical reflection, passive audience groups who lack agency. The radio listener divided television audiences into two contrasting groups: 'we' who are able to select and analyse the content shown; and 'they' or the 'others' who watch television without understanding what they are watching and are therefore easily persuaded. These two groups have very different relations to the past. One group is reflective and takes a critical approach both to past events and to how they are represented in the media. For this group of viewers, nostalgia is a longing for past youth, not for the Soviet state. The other group is

prone to believe in myths and to wish for restoration. The content producers also believe in the existence of these two audiences and thus see their channel as having an educational objective. They claim to approach the past critically and creatively, and regard their audience as similar to themselves, consuming content both seriously and ironically simultaneously. The other group of viewers are believed to be passive consumers, nostalgic for the myths of the powerful Soviet empire. These people may wish for the restoration of the country's former military might and imperial strength. They consume media and creative content without much reflection and are looked down upon as a result. This group is usually also associated with the electorate of the ruling political forces. They are believed to support the authoritarian leanings of the contemporary political order. The producers point to their colleagues who, in their opinion, gratify the demands of these 'sick' audiences.

5.2.2. The Soviet Past in the Documentaries

Nasha Gordost and *Legendi SSSR*

In this section I will present a brief analysis of two documentaries which were broadcast in the end of the 2000s, focusing on their representations of the past and on providing insights into the production process. These documentaries are good illustration of the change that occurred in the representation of the Soviet past in the 2000s. In particular, I will examine how topics were chosen for these documentaries, and how their producers arrived at the general tone of their programmes.

Svetlana, one of the editors who worked on these documentary programmes (as well as on *Moskva – luchshii gorod zemli* ['Moscow is the best city on Earth'], NTV 2009), told me that she has a 'strong feeling' that Soviet theme is increasingly in demand on Russian television. She pointed out that the channels' directors easily approve various programmes on Soviet topics, and added:

It is more popular to have a patriotic or nostalgic tone in the programmes. We are told that we have to produce in such a style that we should not idealise everything, but at the same time we should not criticise. Well, we can criticise something, but we are not allowed to say that everything used to be bad, and now it is good. We are simply told to create something that will make a person sitting in front of the TV sigh and say, 'Yes, I remember that, that's the kind of chewing gum we had, yes.' (Svetlana 2012)

I would like to stress Svetlana's words, both about a certain interest in the Soviet theme from 'higher up', and about the tendency to avoid painting a gloomy picture of the past. It is difficult to determine whether the situation was much different from the 1990s, when the makers of the other programmes I have presented in this chapter tried to find a balance between the complex, unwanted past and the positive personal experiences of youth. Similar tendencies seem to obtain in Svetlana's observation. However, she also points to a certain 'nostalgic and patriotic' tone in the programmes. As I illustrate in the analysis, *Nasha Gordost*⁷ indeed shows a strong presence of patriotic, proud intonations, while *Legendi SSSR* balances between ironic and mythologising attitudes to the past.

Svetlana explicitly states that the programmes she worked on were not 'ordered' from higher up. The pre-production procedure, according to her, was the following: first the author of the idea writes a programme proposal in which he explained the theme, the number of episodes, the on-screen participants (media personalities, for example), and the main idea, which should include the plot and the effect of the programme on the audience. Then the author, who works in a small production company and is not employed by or connected with a specific channel, sends the proposal to the channel's documentary department and waits for an answer. People who work at the channel decide whether the programme would be successful and whether or not to accept the proposal. In the case of these three documentary programmes Svetlana worked on, the channels accepted them very quickly. As Svetlana mentions, no one carried out any specific audience research to try to understand what exactly the audiences want and what types of programmes or topics would achieve the best ratings. One person decided whether the channel would buy the product or not. Although producers usually make a pilot version to see whether the audiences like a programme, in these three cases no pilot version was needed; the channels bought the documentaries directly. Svetlana could not explain why exactly there was a demand for such programmes on the television, but she had a guess:

I know for sure that this is in demand, and people respond to it. There is of course the version that now, before the elections, there is a demand for neutral themes – well, not to say something wrong. While here there is a lot of room for imagination. The Soviet time – it is a period already past; it is possible to show it from various angles. (Svetlana 2012)

She believes that the popularity of the Soviet theme began sometime in 2008–2009. That was when she, working in television, noticed that there was a greater demand for such programmes and that the approval process for productions on this theme became much easier and much shorter. She mentioned that there had been historical programmes before, but of another kind: ‘Without this “hurrah!” patriotism’ (Svetlana 2012).

The Mediation of the Soviet Past

Each of the two documentaries, *Nasha Gordost* (‘Our pride’, NTV 2011), and *Legendi SSSR* (‘The Legends of the USSR’, REN TV 2012), consisted of ten 48-minute episodes. The author of both ideas was Andrei Egorov. Both documentaries organised the presentation of the Soviet past thematically, with chapters on sport, cuisine, holidays and celebrations, fashion, military might, industry etc. Usually a certain decade or a year functioned as a ‘lead-in’ to a topic, whose history was then narrated chronologically. Historic events were recounted by a voice-over, while a mixture of newsreels and extracts from various films added to the picture and illustrated eyewitness accounts.

Nasha Gordost presented the Soviet period in overtly proud tones by focusing on glorious achievements such as ballet, space flight, sport, aviation, the military, industry and atomic energy. The story usually unfolded in the following way: first, the viewers learned how much effort went into achieving great results in a certain field; second, they learned that those accomplishments had been either destroyed, forgotten or lost after a time. At the end, the programme held out a hope for a renaissance in the near future.

The documentary *Legendi SSSR* presented a similar narrative. I will briefly examine one episode of the show, titled *Kvartirnyi vopros* (‘The housing question’). The episode starts with a brief story about the year 1975 in which a voice-over tells viewers about significant events of that year: the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the victory in World War II; the docking of the Soyuz and Apollo space capsules; and the USSR’s attainment of world leadership in the exploitation of natural resources such as oil, iron etc. These events have nothing to do with the topic of the episode, but set a general tone of pride for the narration, while film clips illustrate the commentary. The reason why the episode opens on the year 1975 soon becomes clear: that was the year in which an all-time favourite Soviet television film appeared, *Ironiia sud’by, ili S legkim parom* (‘The

irony of fate, or *Enjoy your bath* (El'dar Ryazanov, 1975), which represents the universe of day-to-day Soviet life through a love story between two people living in Leningrad and Moscow in streets with the same name and in flats with identical interiors. This popular comedy opens a story of how the Soviet state was addressing its perpetual housing problems, which dated back to the revolution of 1917. The story reveals the origin of communal flats and the specific nature of communal housing, tells about revolutionary answers to the housing shortage in the 1920s and 1930s, and continues with Khrushchev's infamous plan to supplying all Soviet citizens with housing, then concludes by noting that the problem was still unsolved after the fall of the Soviet Union.

The general tone of the documentary is ironic: an abundance of jokes and anecdotes in the narration are accompanied by lively music and fast-changing film clips. Even the purges are described in a slightly ironic manner: talking about elite housing in Moscow, the narrator says, 'Some paid for the comfort of living with their lives'; after their deaths their 'families were thrown on the streets with just some tiny bags'. The account of communal housing is illustrated with extracts from famous films, such as *Sobach'ye serdtse* ('The Heart of a Dog', Vladimir Bortko 1988), while prospects of a new life in private flats are represented by clips from the films *Cheremushki* (Herbert Rappaport, 1962) and *Vesna na Zarechnoi Ulitse* ('Spring in Zarechnaia street', Felix Mironer and Marlen Khutsiev, 1956).

Compared with the programmes produced in the 1990s, we find in this episode that the figure of narrator or anchor has disappeared, and it is an off-screen voice that informs the viewers about the events of the past. There is no longer a mediator who can shed light on complicated information and help people to channel their memories. Instead there is a rather authoritarian voice narrating a certain point in history. At the same time, there are no more 'ordinary people' sharing their memories with the viewers. Instead, audiences are introduced to experts and celebrities who usually confirm what the voice is saying, rarely objecting. Even when there is a different opinion, it is followed by another that confirms the narrator's perspective.

The validity of the testimony evidently plays a minor role in comparison to the importance of the celebrity personality. Several celebrities who appear are too young to remember events from the period in question, and either rely on indirect personal memories, i.e. the memories of their

parents or grandparents, or on collective virtual memories. Sometimes they even admit that they have no recollection of the events in question at all because they were too young at the time. For example, the writer Daria Dontsova, having told about life in a barracks block, says, 'Well, of course I don't remember that moment, I was just born' (*Legendi SSSR: Kvartirnyi Vopros* 2011).

Svetlana points out that, while earlier documentaries of this kind set a stronger focus on ordinary people or 'citizens', the main witnesses in the 2000s are celebrities. We find these changes had already taken place in the talk show *Novaia Staraia Kvartira*, in which most of the studio guests are celebrities and famous people, in contrast to the first *Staraia Kvartira* series which ran in the late 1990s, in which the anchors put average people into the spotlight alongside celebrities. Svetlana says, 'We were told that average people were not interesting any more. "No one is interested in average people. It is better if it is the celebrities who remember, because they are more understandable, they attract many people. No one needs to know what Vassilii Ivanovich from next door remembers about the taste of bread in the Soviet Union"' (Svetlana 2012). Memories are only valued if they are the memories of famous people whose celebrity status can attract more viewers, i.e. increase ratings. Hence the picture of the past changes because of economic factors: the makers choose content which is easier to reach and cheaper to buy, search for faster methods of production and material that they judge more attractive. The mediation of memories is dictated by economic motives rather than by an idea of portraying a more 'honest' version of the past. To some extent, the memories and opinions of people who do not belong to celebrity circles are presented in the documentary *Nasha Gordost*. Such people are presented as experts who worked in the industries or cultural fields discussed in the given episode, however, and thus have a different status.

Svetlana considered the documentary *Nasha Gordost* to be 'the most objective of all three series' she had worked on. The difficulty of working with this documentary programme was that it proposed to remind and enlighten people about the great achievements of the Soviet state, and so could not expose the mistakes that had been committed. Some topics included in the programme were very complex and it was difficult to find the right balance of truthful presentation, Svetlana recalls. One such theme was the 'Soviet atom', the discussion of which led in the end to one

of the Soviet Union's greatest disasters, Chernobyl disaster in.²⁰ Svetlana remembers that she could not skip Chernobyl completely because the calamity was so tremendous, but she had to find an explanation for what had happened, an excuse. She could not decry it because nuclear power was a point of pride of the USSR. Nor could she criticise the state for permitting such a misfortune; she was required to

show that there was a pride in how people were fighting this tragic event, how they were working on its consequences, how many people sacrificed their lives for it. It was also said in the programme that if this happened in some other country, the radiation cloud could fly much further. And recovery would not be as fast. (Svetlana 2012)

Svetlana considered the *Legendi SSSR* most nostalgic of the three documentaries she worked on. She described it as similar to *Nasha Gordost* in tone, but different in its themes: it mainly reviewed everyday culture and popular entertainment, including cinema, food, fashion, music etc. Thus Svetlana, a person involved in production of content, associates nostalgia with the remembering of everyday life rather than with more official aspects of the Soviet universe.

5.3. Concluding remarks

Around the same time as the restaurant *Petrovich* opened, the desire to revisit the past penetrated many other cultural forms, including theatre and television. It is noteworthy that most of these plays and television programmes first appeared around the time of the parliamentary and presidential elections of 1995 and 1996. In 1995, the Communist Party secured a majority in the parliament, while Boris Yeltsin struggled to win the presidential election the following year. While there is no evidence that the events were directly connected, it seems significant that many talk shows and documentaries about the country's recent history were broadcast right after the elections.

²⁰ Chernobyl disaster refers to was a catastrophic nuclear accident that occurred on 26 April 1986 at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine. As a result of explosion and fire large quantities of radioactive particles were released into the atmosphere and spread over much of the western USSR and Europe.

The producers suggest several reasons behind the emergence of such shows: as a response to the growing interest in the past and to accommodate this interest by providing entertaining content; to 'cure' the emerging nostalgia for the Soviet Union (which became evident from the recent election results) by showing how the past 'really was'; to understand a complex historical period and to create a link between past, present and future; and to preserve memories of the past for the younger generations in order to avoid a repetition of past mistakes and tragedies. At the same time, these productions were also a reaction to the overall negative picture of the Soviet past, with its Gulags and purges, as the producers tried to balance this dark picture with a more reassuring portrait: not everything had been bad after all; life went on. They therefore focused on people's private lives and allowed them to speak about their individual experiences. That was also a way to 'reconstruct' the history of the country and to dismantle the official grand narratives. Such perspective on history was, however, criticised by others as a symptom of postmodernism, with its deconstruction of totalising narratives and historical pastiche. The critics opposed the focus on everyday life, as it was seen as 'destructive to history'. The criticism is also aimed at television as a medium for narration, which with its focus on entertainment was considered as untrustworthy and incapable and unsuitability for portraying the past. The television anchors are often criticised for presenting historical facts in a light and ironic manner. However, the anchors and producers claim that historical TV productions are not comparable to proper history research and are subject to a different logic: the function of television is, they will claim, to inform about what is on the agenda and respond to the latest tendencies and trends, as well as to educate and entertain the audiences. "In the chronicle format, television seems to claim the role of a 'proper' historian: representing what actually happened, using well-established conventions" (Ericson 2011, 141). In order to do that, television employs an armoury of various strategies, such as the use of archive material and witness testimony, as well as stylistic qualities, such as breaking up a story into smaller blocks of episodes. But at the same time its role is to entertain the audiences with an eye on increasing ratings and earning money.

Comparing to the older generations who weigh the 'new western media' against the 'old Soviet media', and are looking for the familiar content and indulge into melancholic nostalgia, young people can be

attracted by the aesthetics of the past and watch reruns of older programmes due to the aesthetic nostalgia for vintage television (Schrey 2014, 27). Hence for both groups of viewers 'media themselves can become an object of nostalgia' (Schrey 2014, 27), but they would be looking for different aspects.

Therefore nostalgia can either be related both to the content and the style of the media and, consequently, new productions often actively play with old formats in order to create a stronger sense of authenticity. In this respect, the new television formats, represented for instance by the channel *Nostal'giia*, define themselves 'in relationship to earlier technologies of representation (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 28). The *Nostal'giia* channel's contribution is in the particular way it 'refashion[s] older media' (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 15). It is a good example of how the 'old media formats and content' are considered better than the new, because they are seen as more 'real', 'honest' and 'sincere'. At the same time, all television examples presented in this chapter illustrate a similar desire for 'authenticity' and 'representation of the real' (Bolter and Grusin 2000, 21). If shows such as *Staraia Kvartira* and *Namedni* try to convince that what they show what has 'really happened' beyond the frame of television by using various representational strategies such as chronicles and interview with the witnesses, then the *Nostal'giia* channel exploits the 'television flow' to create a feeling of authenticity and immediacy with the past. By recreating television flow of the past, the *Nostal'giia* channel almost removes the indicators of mediation and present its representation of the past as 'presenting life itself'. But at the same time the logic of hypermediacy highlights and multiplies the signs of mediation, which is visible for example in the preview of the programmes for the upcoming days or weeks. In this sense, these programmes as well as the *Nostal'giia* channel are not only about understanding the past and reconstructing identities, but in remediation of the older aesthetics into the new television formats. The mediation of the old 'missing' media formants on television also serves as a 'madeleine cookie', i.e. a catalyst for the process of remembering the Soviet past as well as a frontrunner in terms of what will be remembered and how it will be remembered. Hence paradoxically by attempting to preserve the memory of the past and to resist political nostalgia for the communist regime, these programmes and the channel in fact managed to stimulate nostalgic emotions for the past and for the old aesthetics.

The two plays examined in this chapter illustrate that space defines what and how the audience remembers. Whether it takes place in a courtyard or in a communal flat, the memory that it stimulates relates to day-to-day collective experiences of a courtyard or a flat, with all its possible encounters and personal stories. In contrast to *Petrovich*, where restaurant visitors experience the space by moving freely within it and being in direct contact with various artefacts of the Soviet era, the audience of the plays, although they are involved in the action of remembering by sharing drinks and snacks and by singing along with the actors and the director of the play, still occupies the position of onlookers. In television programmes, the experience of space and time is more multi-dimensional. The television format allows more experience of 'time travel', either in the way studio space is organised, as in the case of *Staraia Kwartira*, or by incorporating archive material, as in the case of *Namedni*. The capability of television to shrink spatial and temporal distances is what makes it different from the how the past is experienced in a restaurant or in a theatre. 'Time travel' is also possible in the latter, but is more symbolic. Moreover, television makes the experience more accessible for a large audience.

There are different understandings of nostalgia, depending on who defines it. The producers claim that nostalgia can be any backward glance or any emotional involvement with the past. Yet at the same time, they distinguish between nostalgia as an emotional longing for one's own irretrievable past – youth – and nostalgia as a conscious attempt to restore the previous political order. A theatre director with family-related experiences with Stalin's purges defined nostalgia for the Soviet period strictly as a longing for the restoration of the old regime, while theatre critics who also had personal experiences with the Soviet period, but probably not with Stalin's purges, apparently defined nostalgia as a longing for the time of their youth, coloured in a positive light and, hence, praised the play for allowing the audience to experience such a bittersweet longing for the past. They rarely admit that they experience personal nostalgia but rather insist that they analyse the past critically – while others, in their opinion, plunge into emotional nostalgia, portraying the past in rosy terms, or even wish to restore the previous political order. Hence nostalgia becomes an important marker of identity, both individually and collectively. By talking explicitly about nostalgia and defining it as a real phenomenon,

individuals are able to identify themselves in relation to other people in society.

What becomes evident at this point is that the use of the Soviet past turned out to be an increasingly profitable enterprise. The form and content of the plays were determined by economic circumstances: it was profitable to make a production of that kind because it demanded little investment and quickly brought in revenue (Rozovski 2012). When the play *Pesni Nashego Dvora* turned out to be commercially and artistically successful, Rozovski made another, similar play, *Pesni Nashei Kommunal'ki*, which was staged indoors on a set representing an old communal flat. Many nostalgic-themed television programmes were launched on the principal Russian television channels and several of them have won national awards. As this study shows, obvious economic incentives were among the reasons behind the creation of the *Nostal'giia* channel. At the time it went on air, broadcasting reruns of archived television material was an inexpensive way of filling programming time. When we consider the fact that interest in the Soviet past was at its zenith in the early 2000s and the obvious commercialisation of nostalgic sentiments, the emergence of such a channel seems to be a logical continuation of the trend. However, it appears that the makers of the channel did not make a great deal of money by their initiative, as the content turned out to be increasingly expensive due to the increasing demands.

Most importantly, the programmes and theatre plays produced in the 1990s revealed that it was predominantly a reflective rather than a restorative nostalgia that was mediated during those years (to use Svetlana Boym's dichotomous terms). Reflective nostalgia still exists in the 2000s, as we can observe from the analysis of the *Nostal'giia* channel, although certain change in televised nostalgia can be observed after the millennium. But then again, depending on who defines nostalgia what one could characterise as non-political reflective nostalgia can be interpreted by others as political and restorative nostalgia. At the same time the research reveals that in fact all nostalgia is political and even reflective, melancholic longing for the past can be in fact a indication of a political stand point.

The analysis of the two documentaries presented in the second section sheds some light on the changes in the representations of the past that occurred after the millennium. First of all, we see that the Soviet past continues to be increasingly commercialised; it has become a product that can be highly profitable. Increasing demands for archive material also

make them more expensive and ultimately less affordable for small channels. At the same time, it becomes evident that public officials have started to use the Soviet past as a uniting element for nation building. It is obviously tricky to demonstrate to what extent this is part of a conscious political strategy from the government ranks, but the presence of a desire to see patriotic programmes built on the idealised representations of the past is nevertheless evident. Ordinary people are no longer present among the participants in televised discussions. Their places are taken by celebrities, whose status and stories attract more viewers. While federal channels broadcast documentaries, talk shows similar to those made in the 1990s are pushed to the margins – that is, to cable and niche channels whose audiences are not as large as those of the federal channels. This inevitably leads to greater homogeneity in the representations of the past.



Top: Screenshot of the TV show Staraia Kvartira, the episode about 1953. Two singing generations
Bottom: Screenshot of the TV show Namedni: Nasha Era 1961-1991. Year 1961. The episode about the famous Soviet comedy trio

6. Fashionable Nostalgia

6.1. Fashion as Communication

This chapter focuses on another mediating platform: fashion. I will begin by introducing fashion as both a platform for the construction of identities and as a symbolic economy that produces and communicates meanings, before offering a few remarks about the Russian fashion industry in particular. Following the plan of previous chapters, I will then present first the case studies from the period of the 1990s, then those from the 2000s. These are followed by a brief analysis of subculture fashion practices of the late 1980s, in which Soviet symbols were appropriated in an ironic manner in attempts to signal resistance to the Soviet ideology. This discussion prepares the ground for an analysis of selected contemporary Russian fashion brands – Denis Simachev and Shapovalova, both founded in the 2000s – which illustrate commercial and political uses of the Soviet past in fashion design.

My perspective on fashion is communicative, focusing on the identities, ideals and desires that fashion communicates (see e.g. Barnard 2002/2009). The meanings of fashion are shaped in complex sets of use practices in which fashion producers, consumers and critics communicate interpretations of dress and garments. As the fashion historian Christopher Breward has put it, fashion is a ‘process which moves through several modes of action and experience, passing from the designer, through the manufacturer, the advertiser, and the retailer and on to the consumer, and sometimes linking back from consumer to designer, or even running in reverse’ (Breward 2003, 17). Moreover, fashion is made under the influence of mediated culture, and its meanings are then made and circulated in various media genres: ‘Fashion depends for its power on communication. Fashion change can only occur if information is shared, the more information, the more dramatic the impact of fashion on human behaviour’ (Lynch and Strauss 2007, 1).

At the same time it is difficult to argue that fashion can be understood as a particular medium in the same way as television, for instance. While fashion scholars apply the word ‘medium’ to fashion (e.g. Christopher

Breward 2003, 14), most media researchers, as well as other people in the general public, tend not to regard clothes as media, except perhaps in a metaphoric sense. In media and communication studies, media tend to be understood only as specific and institutionalised technologies primarily used for communication: telephone, television, Internet etc. (McQuail 2010). Fashion does have a particular material carrier, but this carrier (at least in regard to dress) is not made solely for communication, but has other important functions, such as keeping warm, hiding the naked body from others' gaze, protecting it from the sun, etc. In this sense, clothes are not in themselves solely or primarily used as communication media in the sense that telephones are.

In general, dress is categorised differently from media technologies. Fashion does share certain characteristics with media, even if it is not commonly defined as a medium. In this sense, one might put fashion in the same pool of platforms for symbolic expression with language, talk, dance or music, for example. These are all spheres of communicative and cultural practices, and they perform mediating functions in society, as does fashion, yet they are normally described by other concepts – as symbolic modes, modes of expression, genres of communication etc. Fashion can be seen as a kind of cultural practice that develops within (and makes use of) different media sectors but which is increasingly interwoven (especially in mediatised late modern societies) with media discourses. The core practices of fashion – making clothes and showing them on the runway – need not in themselves be regarded as media practices, but can be seen rather as a kind of face-to-face interaction for reaching out and interacting with users or audiences, as well as for getting impulses to new creations. It is more accurate to conceive fashion as a system of symbols to which people give meaning and attach value. At the same time, fashion can be understood as a symbolic economy which produces and disseminates meanings. Consequently, the fashion industry should be understood as a 'powerful market of cultural construction of meaningful identities', and dress as 'constituting one of the most basic methods through which we are able to place ourselves and the others in the social world' (Goodrum 2005, 24).

As the fashion scholar Djurdja Bartlett puts it, 'Fashion is most often associated with novelty, but its heritage is equally important for its functioning, both as its cultural capital and as its organising principle' (Bartlett 2011, 120). The strategy of recycling past styles is not something

new or specific only to modern times. The history of fashion shows that in fact new trends were often inspired by previous styles: the European noblewoman's dress in the early 19th century and in the early 20th century was inspired by ancient Greek and Roman women's garments. Yet although new fashion trends dig in the past for ideas, they still present something new which is in line with larger cultural trends of their time. What the fashion industry produces should be modern and new. For new fashion to be successful, it must make a break with the previous trend. People discard old garments in order to follow the trends and the emergence of new styles. Because new styles change rapidly, it seems that what fashion is about is a speedy change from one style to another. However, on a closer look, one might notice that although fashion is pushed forward by a demand for the new, it still has to connect with tradition. Fashion brands and fashion houses are known and recognised for their own styles, and the loyalty to a certain style is what retains customers. Fashion brands often promise their clientele a stable identity which has a long tradition and is recognisable on first sight. Variations and modifications in this stable identity of fashion brands, connected to the changing trends, are what make them modern and attractive to customers. In this way, fashion brands evolve in the intersection between past and future, between tradition and innovation.

6.2. Russian Fashion

During the years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fashion industry in Russia was not in a good state. However, although there were few players active in fashion business in the early 1990s, the Russian fashion industry started to gather speed in the 2000s, and soon there were many prestigious department stores, big chains, online retailers and consumers who demanded variety and exclusivity (Zavel'skaia 2013, 26). Russia became an attractive market for the fashion business as its citizens increasingly spent money on fashion products. However, although some fashion businesses and factories had managed to rise from the ashes and launch new competitive collections by 2008, they stopped production when the global economic crisis hit.¹ Nevertheless, the Russian fashion

¹ The three biggest fashion companies, Pervomaiskaia Zaria (with the brands Zarina and Befree), Factory of St. Petersburg (with the FOSP label), and Moscow's Uzori (Gota), which were founded during the Soviet era and had managed to adjust to the

market managed to recover quickly from the consequences of the crisis, and since then has grown steadily (Burmatikov and Khmurenko 2013, 36; Medovnikova 2010).

In the 1990s, Russian fashion was mainly represented by older designers, such as Slava Zaitsev and Valentin Yudashkin, but in the 2000s, a new generation of Russian designers began to conquer the heights of fashion. The most successful among them are the brands of Denis Simachev, Alena Akhmadulina, Igor Chapurin, Vika Gazinskaya, Ulyana Sergeenko, and Miroslava Duma, which have made their way into the major international fashion weeks. These designers have appropriated Russian cultural heritage to varying degrees. As Djurdja Bartlett points out, they 'have introduced a new type of quotation, one that is traditionally Russian yet distant and ironic, into domestic fashion ... these designers translate their own past – ethnic, tsarist, and socialist – into contemporary fashion' (Bartlett 2011, 118). If some, such as Igor Chapurin and Miroslava Duma, are more discreet in their interpretations of Russian heritage, others, such as Alena Akhmadulina, Vika Gazinskaya and Ulyana Sergeenko, remain true to Russian folk tales and romanticised visions of Russia's imperial past. Other designers, such as Olga Soldatova (who in the mid-1990s appropriated in a very ironic manner the Soviet uniform, the red star, and Russian felt boots), Maksim Chernitsov (who replays Soviet symbols in several collections), Katya Bochavar (who graciously reinterprets Soviet emblems in trendy jewellery), Denis Simachev (whose collections quote Soviet pop culture) and Antonina Shapovalova (who combines nostalgia for the imperial and the Soviet past with patriotic slogans) have turned to Soviet cultural heritage for inspiration. Bearing in mind that fashion plays a special role in culture by helping, more than any other product category, to construct and communicate identities, the fact that the Soviet past is being recycled in fashion deserves a closer look.

6.3. The Clothed Body as a Platform for Resistance

In this section I will briefly focus on subculture dress of the late 1980s and early 1990s to illustrate how it appropriated the Soviet system of signs and

new market economy and create strong brands and far-reaching retail systems across the country, were forced to stop production or to move it to China by 2008 (Moskalenko 2008).

functioned as a platform for resistance and identity construction. Although the first examples are located chronologically outside the time frame of this dissertation, many of the dress practices in which references to the Soviet period can be detected began before 1991, and some of the artists, such as Alexander Petlura and Olga Soldatova, continued to work with Soviet symbols in their artistic and design production of the 1990s.

The roots of this subcultural dress culture are actually situated in the late 1980s. The chronological frame of this fashion phenomenon can be drawn somewhere between 1985 and 1995, with its peak activity between 1985 and 1988.² The change in the political climate around 1985, when Gorbachev introduced *glasnost*, led to the amalgamation of previously disparate subculture movements: artists, punks, new-wavers and rockers stood up on the same side of the barricades. These young people were united by a shared sense of dissatisfaction and protest. They wanted to question or even destroy what was known as the 'common Soviet man' and to sneer at all the sacred relics and places of the Soviet state. The number of protesters was small, and it was important for them to find each other in the Soviet social landscape.³ They therefore used fashion as a platform for rebellion, as a manifestation of inner freedom, and as a protest against the inherent conformity of Soviet society.⁴ As in Western

² There were many reasons for this trend to decline. First, Western formats of glossy magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Vogue*, introduced Western fashions and brands in Russia around the same time. Second, underground designs were hardly suitable for the tough economic rules of the 1990s, let alone for large-scale mass production (which was in deep depression by 1998 and never managed to recover even by 2012). Third, when they could, some of the designers and artists emigrated to the West and continued their careers as professional designers there. Others started families and left the subculture scene.

³ Young people's interest both in Western cultures and in resisting the moralising direction of the Komsomol started long before 1985. The Moscow World Festival of Youth and Students in 1957 kicked off the phenomena of *stiliagi* and of people who rejected any non-Soviet way of life. Colourfully dressed according to the latest Western fashions and dancing to the hottest Western hits, the *stiliagi* (dandies or hipsters in English) were criticised by ideologically loyal citizens, while Komsomol brigades patrolled the streets and aggressively persecuted them by public undressing, cutting off their hair and destroying their outfits. (On the *stiliagi*, see Kimmerling 2007; Kristin Roth Ay 2004; Rafikova 2010). In the 1970s, all over the Soviet Union, the informal economy supplied Soviet mods, hipsters and hippies with overpriced Western products and home-made clothing and accessories. While the dress rebellion continued, its repression continued as well, and many *neformali* (people who went beyond accepted norms of behaviour) suffered a great deal from it.

⁴ The Soviet fashion industry in the late socialist period lagged hopelessly behind its Western counterpart, in spite of access to a number of talented professionals. Because the majority of the population had never had access to good design and quality textiles,

subcultures, dress became the main form of self-expression and a communicative code used to identify people with the same world-view (Hebdige 1979; Briggs and Cobley 1999; Baxter and Marina 2008).

In 1988, this fashion phenomenon was baptised 'alternative fashion' by the Polish magazine *Młodość*, and the word 'alternative' was often used to describe Soviet subcultures (Buster 2011). The members of the underground community in which the phenomenon was born called themselves *alternativshchiki* ('alternative people'), distinguishing themselves from the conformist majority (Petlura 2012). In Russian, the adjective *al'ternativnyi* means 'opposite to what currently obtains', implying a choice of one option over another (Ozhegov). 'Alternative culture' therefore has the meaning of a culture that provides a choice. The terms 'alternative culture' and 'alternative fashion' thus reflect a common approach to the Soviet system in which the official Soviet culture is diametrically opposed to a non-official counterculture (Cushman 1995). Alexei Yurchak believes that, in reality, the relations between the Soviet system and its citizens during that period were more complex, and he therefore proposes the concept of a 'hybrid' Soviet culture in which official and non-official elements were deeply intertwined. The banning of some cultures in the Soviet Union led to the emergence of others which otherwise never would have been formed (Yurchak 2006). Something similar can be said about Soviet dress culture: the undeveloped Soviet fashion industry led to outbursts of creativity in society; almost everybody was his or her own designer (Bartlett 2010). That is why the term 'Soviet fashion' should not be narrowly applied only to the 'official' designs produced by the state fashion houses such as *Dom Mod*, but should also

people had to make their own fashions after simple patterns available in specialised publications which taught Soviet citizens basic DIY principles. Yet, in general, clothes looked rather dull, and only those who had access to distribution channels or went abroad were able to follow international trends. Black markets were booming with Western products as well as with home-made dyed jeans. The constant shortage and high prices of quality Western products made people worship them, queuing for hours to buy imported items. Like the rest of the Soviet economy, fashion developed not according to the 'fashion logic' of change, but according to central five-year plans (Bartlett, 2010). There were several ateliers that catered for the Soviet nomenclature and showed the norms of 'good taste' to the rest of the country. Clothes produced and merchandised for average people were not only of terribly low quality, but also very hard to get. Those who bought costly items therefore took good care of them (Zakharova 2007; Vanshtein 2007; Bartlett 2007; Gurova 2007; Romanov i Iarskaia-Smirnova 2005; Zakharova 2006).

include any creative fashion experiment of that time.⁵ To avoid the restrictive polarities of official and unofficial culture or official and alternative fashion, I will use the term 'fashion of Soviet subcultures'. Alternatively, this phenomenon can also be called 'Soviet underground fashion' since many of these subculture groups had a semi-legal status.

The concentration of punk fashion was at its highest during 'Assa parades', manifestations of the underground movement that usually involved the band Pop-Mekhanika led by the artist Sergei Kurekhin, a creative collaboration of rock musicians, artists and poets (Buster 2011, 16).⁶ Oleg Kolomiichuk, nicknamed Garri or Garik Assa, a former black-market trader and a king of the rag trade and second-hand markets, became a trendsetter in this underground environment, creating stage outfits and everyday clothing for rock musicians together with others. To dress the band Pop-Mekhanika, Assa even founded an impromptu fashion house, Ai-da-Liuli.⁷ The Assa parades were, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's term, a kind of carnival that created 'threshold' situations where Soviet hierarchies and normalised truths could be questioned and broken; Soviet ready-made truths were overturned in these costume performances by voices and energies that were normally suppressed (Bakhtin 1965). Underground fashion became a platform where alternative individual voices could interact with one another and be expressed and heard. The artistic crowds of Moscow followed the reverse hierarchy of carnivals: they wore clothes upside down and inside out, used toys as

⁵ Some creative experiments by the members of subcultures even became recognised on an international level. One of the symbols of recognition of these designs was the title Miss Alternative 98, awarded to Pani Bronya (Dubner) and the designer Alexander Petlura (Liashenko).

⁶ Misha Buster and Irina Meglinskaia curated the exhibition called Alternative Fashion before Glossies: 1985–1995 (Garage Centre for Contemporary Culture, April 28–June 12, 2011), which provided a fascinating picture of the alternative fashion scene in the post-perestroika period.

⁷ Assa's initiative was later continued by the artist Alexander Petlura, who took over the collection around 1986–1987, developed the idea of the fashion house and became a key figure of Moscow's art scene. An enormous collection of garments from different eras became a basis of Petlura's artistic work. His project 'Empire of Things' told the unofficial history of the Soviet Union through material objects. The clothed human body became a vessel for historical narration marked by personal stories and memories. In Petlura's long-term project, the knowledge of Soviet reality was mediated through educational initiatives (lectures, exhibitions and shows at higher education institutions at home and abroad) and through ironic appropriations and interpretations in performances and shows. At the same time, his work influenced contemporary Russian prêt-à-porter fashions (Petlura 2012).

weapons and weapons as toys, national flags as dresses and uniforms as evening gowns. The artists Elena Khudiakova, Katya Mikulskaya, Gosha Ostretsov, Timur Novikov and Alexander Petlura used Soviet military uniforms and work clothes in their creations. At flea markets they purchased caps, boots, red banners, flight helmets and above all military uniforms and coats, which they later transformed into dresses by cutting off the sleeves, painting them in trendy acid colours, adding authentic accessories such as military belts. While some of them created wearable garments, others constructed art pieces more suitable for artistic performances held in artists' squats and at spontaneous hangouts in Moscow or Leningrad (Petlura 2012; Morozov 2012). They clearly mocked both the ideals of the military might of the Soviet army and the idea of world revolution by adding children's toys, plastic baby potties and toy tanks to military uniforms. The creative recycling of military uniforms even acquired its own name: *mertvy razvedchik*, the 'dead spy' style. The style consisted of baggy trousers gathered in pleats at the waist, big jackets with the sleeves rolled up, double-breasted coats and hats. The name of the style referred to the origin of the clothes: the garments were bought at flea markets were supposed to have been sold by the widows of deceased KGB officers (Petlura 2012).⁸

By recontextualising Soviet symbols such as military uniforms, these designers removed both the heroic pathos and the negative attitudes that surrounded such symbols during the time of perestroika. In this naive art of regression to childhood one can read a very serious irony towards the Soviet state (Buster 2011, 26–27). Alexei Yurchak, analysing the subcultures of late socialism, proposed applying the term *steb* (also romanised '*stiob*'), a specific type of irony which is defined by its serious attitude, to the ideological symbols of the system (Yurchak 1999; 2005; 2006a). It was not always clear whether the author of *steb* approved of or was laughing at the system. Sometimes the two attitudes merged so that it was impossible to distinguish between them. Often it was not the communist ideology itself that was being laughed at and mocked, but rather the submissive loyalty to it. 'Serious *steb*' consisted of two symbolic

⁸ The recycling of military themes is a common phenomenon in the fashion world. Military dress and uniforms referring to notions of power, dominance and subversion played an essential role in the construction of gender identities around the world (Craik 2005). Charged with connotations of power and subversion, uniforms come back into fashion from time to time.

procedures: over-identification with and recontextualisation of ideological signs. Over-identification means the automatic reproduction of the form of the sign (which might be a text or a ritual) as it is supposed to be produced in the official practice of the system. Recontextualisation, according to Yurchak, means the placement of the sign into a different context with the result that a new connection between the signifier and the signified appears, and with it the peculiarity of the whole ideological construction, which was not apparent in the ordinary context, becomes visible. The recontextualisation thus reveals the absurdity of a dominant ideology (Yurchak 2006, 250; 1999, 84). By recontextualising Soviet symbols such as Pioneer and military uniforms, the underground designers removed their heroic pathos and reestablished sincere and warm attitudes to these symbols, which had been simply dismissed during perestroika. Thus the ironic treatment of the reappropriated symbols did not always mean a degrading of these inherited signs, but could also contain a warm and caring attitude towards them. In this case, it was possible for certain positive and naive aspects of Soviet culture to preserve their positive meaning.

These young people had a special attitude towards historic objects. The Tishinka flea market was a gold mine to them (Petlura 2012). They believed that, while one could, in theory, try to sew something new, there was no real need because ready garments of perfect quality, and with a long and interesting history, already existed. They only had to be found in the piles of waste material. Novelty was thus seen, not in the creation of new objects, but in new interpretations which became possible by putting existing objects into a new context and combining them with unexpected accessories and elements, which shocked and amused people. In this mode of treating second-hand objects, Soviet subcultures were comparable with the cut 'n' mix, bricolage attitude of Western punk as analysed not least by Dick Hebdige (1979) and by Angela McRobbie (1989).⁹ Western subcultures were characterised for many observers by the appropriation of ready-mades and an interest in the everyday (Groys 1988/1992, 105). Just as American artists turned to advertising as a source of inspiration, Russian artists turned to the field of Soviet propaganda (Groys 1988/1992, 106) and to readily

⁹ The concept of *bricolage*, which Hebdige took from Lévi-Strauss, also relates to Dadaism and Futurism, as well as to montage and collage as practiced in Russia in the 1920s.

available symbols of Soviet power – military uniforms and many other objects, such as toys and kitchenware.

The interest in the discarded objects and the use of irony as the main methodological tool for the deconstruction of the totalising Soviet ideology makes it possible to place these artistic practices in a broader postmodernist theoretical framework. After all, irony and parody were the instruments used by the protagonists of the artistic and intellectual movements of Russian conceptualism and Sots-Art, also referred to as Soviet Pop Art or Socialist Art.¹⁰ They transformed the Soviet ideological system 'into material for parody and pastiche, often characterised also by a lyrical and nostalgic attitude' (Epstein 2010, 64). Working in various media, artists appropriated Socialist visual language to produce works aimed at challenging the ideological and aesthetic dictates of the Soviet state. Sots-Art appropriated the ready-made symbols, images, ideological truths and propaganda of Socialist power, presenting them in a playful, ironic manner and aiming to free the viewers from their ideological stereotypes.

Such practices of Russian conceptualism were often understood as a result of or a reaction to socio-cultural trauma (Boym 2001; Oushakine 2007). Professor of Literature Ellen Rutten, for example, explains Russian postmodernist artists' and writers' interest in Soviet ideology and symbols as 'attempts to come to terms with the legacy of the Soviet, and particularly Stalinist, past' (Rutten 2009, 540). Rutten explains the grotesque-humorous or fantastical approach which seems to prevail in Russian art in the 1980s as a work of 'post-memory', a term used by Marianne Hirsh (2008). If the first artistic reactions to traumatic historical experiences are usually biographical ones, linked to those who have witnessed traumatic events, the shift towards the fantastic-grotesque is typical of second-generation artistic treatments of the past. The second and third generations, Hirsh writes, manage to free themselves from their parents' memories and claim their own way of remembering history. The artistic

¹⁰ Sots Art, invented in the early 1970s by two Russian-born artists, Vitalii Komar and Alexander Melamid, is associated with conceptualism, an artistic movement that relied heavily on a philosophical foundation. Mikhail Epstein thinks that Russian conceptualism should be regarded as a broader philosophical movement (Epstein 2010). Boym argues that the unofficial movement of Moscow romantic conceptualism, originally so named by Boris Groys, 'was not so much an artistic school as a subculture and way of life' (Boym 2001, 311).

duo Vitalii Komar and Alexander Melamid for example began an ‘excavation’ of buried memories of the past by ‘digging’ up repressed memories and questioning their emotional substance. They did not reject historical events and their consequences, but resurfaced them through recollection and image production. ‘Necrology’, a constant evocation of the past, helped Komar and Melamid to advance into the future (Ratcliff 1988, 25; 156).

By constantly reflecting on their past perceptions of Soviet life – everything from passports to banners to Socialist Realism – they are guarding themselves, and hopefully their viewers, from *not* recognising the signs of a totalitarian regime in the future. The danger of amnesia is one that Komar and Melamid consider so real in our modern world. They have spent their careers remembering so that we will recognise danger in the future. Again, for them the ‘past and future meet in the present’. They employ nostalgia as a means for rewriting future history. (Leigh-Perlman 2009, 16)

Like Komar and Melamid, the artistic youth of the Moscow and Lenin-grad underground excavated symbols of the Soviet past in order not to forget its tragedies and to pass on the memory of it to younger generations: this is the attitude I have already described in the chapter on dramatised forms of nostalgia. The nostalgia of Alexander Petlura, for example, was of an archaeological nature and driven by the need to remember and preserve important aspects of the past in material form – a type of nostalgia we have seen in previous chapters.

6.4. The Fashion Brand Denis Simachev and the Commercial Use of the Past

In this section I will analyse the contemporary Russian fashion brand Denis Simachev in order to illustrate the commercial use of the Soviet past in the global fashion world in the mid-2000s and to show what had changed since the 1980s and 1990s. I will also offer insights into the theory of nostalgia by focusing on the agency of the interpreter.

6.4.1. Branding in the Global Age

The Denis Simachev brand appeared on the fashion scene in the early 2000s. It was launched by the young and promising Moscow-based

designer Denis Simachev, who, by the end of the 2000s, had already shown his collections in Milan and gained worldwide recognition.

The former art director of the brand, Ivan Makarov, says that, while working on the collections, he tried to think through what comprises the identity of modern Russian people: memories and dreams, experiences and wishes, the surrounding environment, favourite cartoons, films and television programmes (Makarov 2013). The resulting identity was a patchwork of many different elements, each equally important. A certain theme inspired each collection – summer vacations, the marines, the Olympic Games – and was elaborated through a collage of various associations to that topic. While some collections had more references to the Soviet past, others referred to more distant or more recent periods in Russian history. For example:

Time of innocence, light-hearted moments of unlimited daydreaming, era of childish ability to be happy for no apparent reason. Our 1980s were blend of purity and brutality. [The] 1980s Olympic Games came into play like extra vacations, undeserved holiday, and splendid feast. In spite of international isolation Moscow Olympic Games brought along fresh air, new ideas, alien looking foreigners, loads of Marlboro and Pepsi. And after that country could never be the same. (www.denissimachev.com2004)

The choice of the Russian theme, in Simachev's opinion, is explained by market logic: what else could he do in order to be noticed on the international fashion market? He could attract consumers by offering them something new which can be easily read by all and which, at the same time, is something very exclusive. In the early 2000s, as Simachev states, no one dared to use a Russian theme: many Russian designers who were active during that period built their brand identities on *podrazhanie inostrannomu*, or 'foreignism', i.e. trying to appear anything but Russian. Simachev believed that the only way to become successful on the global market was to play a Russian card, which turned out to be profitable. Later, several Russian designers such as Alena Akhmadulina and Ulyana Sergeenko adopted a Russian style by appropriating Russian fairy tales as sources of inspiration, and also turned to Russian tsarist history in search of interesting themes (they also succeeded by reintroducing a fragile,

princess-like, fairy-tale femininity in their women's collections).¹¹ Other designers, such as Maksim Chernitsov, also referred to the Russian past and to the Soviet theme in particular, while Denis Simachev was the most prominent figure to capitalise on the Russian theme.¹² The use of the Russian theme became an entrance card to the global fashion markets – something new, something different, something special. The comparison is unequal without a doubt, but nevertheless one might say that Denis Simachev in the early 2000s brought to the West an updated Russian theme in the same way that Sergei Diaghilev once introduced Russian culture and ballet to Paris in the early twentieth century.¹³

What we can learn from this example is that the perceived homogenisation of the global fashion market has led to active attempts to construct brand identity through the use of the Russian national past and cultural heritage. Denis Simachev and Ivan Makarov believe that globalisation processes lead to 'cultural homogenisation', with an accompanying dominance of a homogenised and westernised consumer culture that absorbs local cultures and erodes their unique features (Kraidy 2005, 1–23). Denis Simachev talks in particular about 'Americanisation', the influence of American culture in Europe and in the world, and the necessity of finding one's own unique identity in response to the dominance of American culture (cf. Campbell, Davies and McKay 2004). Simachev's interest in national roots as inspirational material for cultural production as a response to the perceived damaging effects of the global economy is hardly surprising. The rise of national sentiments, visible in one form or another, is one of the responses to increasing globalisation. Augmenting the fascination with national heritage is an attempt to establish a strong national and cultural identity in the world of the global economy and global media trends (Kaldor 2004). In fashion and in other spheres of cultural production concerned with the construction of

¹¹ On Alena Akhmadullina, see <http://alenaakhmadullina.com/>. On Ulyana Sergeenko, see her page in Vkontakte, https://vk.com/ulyana_sergeenko.

¹² In 2005, Chernitsov presented his collection Homocosmodromo, in which he explored the theme of space exploration using images of Yuri Gagarin and the Soviet space dogs. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdbMDkC3mpk>. In his subsequent work he elaborated more on the Russian theme, taking a profound philosophical approach to it. One example is his Fall–Winter 2010/2011 collection, *Russkii Dukh* ('Russian spirit').

¹³ The Russian impresario Sergei Diaghilev created the ballet company *Les Ballets russes*, which was based in Paris and performed in the period 1909–1929. It is regarded as one of the most influential ballet enterprises in dance history and introduced Europe to Russian culture (Garafola 1998).

identities, these tendencies become even more pronounced, and the interest in the national past in fashion is hardly a new phenomenon.¹⁴ I would say rather that the use of national heritage for fashion branding is an common strategy, and that fashion designers always stress the uniqueness of their brands on the global market. In the work of Denis Simachev, one can observe an attempt to escape from globalised uniformity by means of stylistic eclecticism based on the use of local cultural elements.

Internationally, the interest in the past and in historical styles, and their commercial exploitation, has become a global trend during the past twenty years. The Swedish journalist Katia Hultquist wrote in the cultural pages of the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* that young and trendy people cannot get enough of the past (Hultquist 2013). Where nostalgia used to be seen as a sign of weakness, today the return to the past plays an important role. The past has become a treasure trove of new business ideas. If they are packaged in an attractive way and are easily digestible and aesthetically pleasing, they can become very successful. Among young people in their twenties and thirties, there are many groups who play on past aesthetics. Striving for a unique identity, young people are looking to the past to find styles that suit them and would make them distinguishable in the crowds of the mainstream. Hence, it is not surprising that Denis Simachev looks back to the past for inspiration. What is interesting, however, is how the designer himself sees the process of reusing symbols of the past in the creation of a new product and how his approach differs from the others.

Denis Simachev claims that he uses what he knows best and is interested in the past ‘as a historian’:

I don’t use things I have only seen briefly, things I like without understanding what they are. I always use only approved elements, although many people may have forgotten them. I remind people about them in a slightly different context. So I look at the same problem, but from a different perspective, and all of a sudden it becomes interesting because it is different. (Simachev 2012)

Denis Simachev indeed looks at the Soviet past from a specific angle. As his brand’s website states, the leitmotiv of the Denis Simachev Spring–

¹⁴ On national identity, politics and fashion, see Paulicelli and Clark (2009) and Goodrum (2005).

Summer 2004 men's collection is '[lyrical remembrances of the strange era of Eighties, last decade of faded away USSR]'¹⁵. One of the most frequent motifs in this collection is the image of a little bear, which the designer uses as a print on t-shirts, trousers and jackets. It is a direct replica of the iconic Olympic mascot of the 22nd Olympic games, which took place in Moscow in 1980. The Denis Simachev brand tries to communicate that the Olympic games were an important moment in the lives of many young people born in that period. The designer and his team propose to look at this theme ironically, without searching for a profound political meaning. He uses the Olympic symbols to signify the period of the 1980s, when his customers and the people producing the collection were young and exited about their future. For them, the Moscow Olympics signified a certain phase of their lives, their hopes and dreams, and the events that happened in the period around the Olympic games (Makarov 2013). As the brand's website states, what Denis Simachev refers to in this collection is the time of youth, 'light-hearted moments of unlimited daydreaming'. Thus the Olympic games become a background for something more important – notably, feeling young and playful. At the same time, the Moscow games were associated with the moment when the East met the West, and opened up more interesting opportunities for joyful and light-hearted activities.

The optimistic image of the 1980s is not the only one Denis Simachev tries to recall. The affirmative image of the last decades of the Soviet Union is inseparable from the image of the 1990s, the period when Denis Simachev and his customers entered the formative period of youth, which is also part of the identity of his generation. These young men to whom Denis Simachev dedicated his collection were born in the late socialist period and, like all children of that generation, became Pioneers. With the fall of the Soviet Union their life changed: the socio-economic and political crisis merged with the personal crisis of growing up. Many children of the 1990s became gangsters. Blood, sex, power, force and brutality became associated with what the writer Viktor Pelevin (1999) called *Generation P*, the generation that was born in the USSR and then faced the harsh times of the 1990s.

For example, the Fall–Winter 2007/2008 collection, titled 'Bang–Bang', presents a romantic picture of the 1990s though the portrayal of

¹⁵ See http://www.denissimachev.com/content/tm_archive_mens_ss_04.html.

highly sexualised and aggressive masculine images. The collection represents stylish, business-like men with serious and severe expressions on their faces. They wear black fur hats and large Soviet national emblems are positioned on the backs of their jackets. Gold chains and other gold ornaments are common. The catwalk show was accompanied by a careful selection of music, mixed from folk and classical passages and hip-hop texts. The lyrics of the music accompanying the show describe the period of the 1990s as tough time for tough guys:

Guns, rifles, apartments [...],
Pursuit, front doors, fences [...],
Cute bitches [...],
Tough arms [...],
Sport pants and bracelets [...],
Kresty [Prison] and shoot-outs [...],
Informal address [...],
Brigades, brigades [...],
Money and tough backs [...].

Although a major part of the collection is devoted to the brave machos of the 1990s, another representation in it refers to the same period, but to another group of men in power: the police. These men wear fur hats, grey trousers of a classic cut, classic shirts with ties under zippered cardigans and red jackets with fur collars.¹⁶

Whether Denis Simachev's perspective is a totally new one is debatable. As the designer's website describes it, the new perspective is in opposition to existing norms, and the common outlook on the Soviet past is one of the elements on which this opposition is built.¹⁷ As we have seen, this strategy was already used by the subculture groups, with the difference that the subcultures were trying to resist the serious attitude towards the Soviet system and to show its absurdity, whereas Denis Simachev

¹⁶ These two characters, the gangster and the policeman, recall the TV series which were popular in the 1990s and early 2000s. In the 1990s there was a need for a hero who, living next door to ordinary people and facing the same issues every day, fights for justice in troubled times and saves innocent people. One such series was *Ulitsy razbitykh fonarei* ('Streets of broken lanterns'), which was produced in 1997 after the bestselling crime novels of Andrei Kivinov and earned top ratings. Another crime miniseries, *Brigada* ('Law of the lawless'), directed by Aleksei Sidorov and released in 2002, presented new heroes of the time, narrating the lives of four young people from the summer of 1989 to the spring of 2000.

¹⁷ See http://denissimachev.com/content/tm_about.html.

wants to show that instead of criticising the past, one can look at it with a smile: 'It is widely accepted to knit one's brows and say, "Yes, it was very difficult, it was a terrible period in the history of our country." Of course one can moan about it, but one can also smile and fight everything bad that happened with humour' (Simachev 2012). At the same time, Denis Simachev takes credit for introducing an ironic attitude towards the Soviet past, claiming that no one did so before: 'In regard to the references to the USSR, I should say that no one ever played with this type of humour. No one ever looked at it with such *steb*' (Simachev 2012). As we have seen in the previous section, however, *steb* had been used by the members of subcultures as a strategy in their treatment of the Soviet system, so that the designer was actually following a trail that had already been blazed. Moreover, while subculture fashion was a platform for real resistance, and many people ended up in police stations for wearing their outfits, the Denis Simachev brand merely plays with the idea of rebellion; it does not revolt against the system. Resistance loses its meaning, becomes something exciting and attractive, and turns into a good selling point.

Positive attitudes and emotions become the cornerstone of the new identity and the selling point of the brand. That is why Denis Simachev has to be careful in cherry-picking references:

I observe it all from a distance and pick funny moments. I try to transplant all these funny moments onto clothing, or some event or lifestyle, in order to sell it. A person does not buy something Soviet, but he or she buys an emotion. Many foreigners don't even understand what is pictured here, but they buy the mood. They very much like the drive which comes from these objects. That is why it is not Soviet. So there are many people who really like it, who consider it theirs, and who do not want to be sad all over again about what is past. One has to smile more often. (Simachev 2012)

In marketing theory, the consumer's attachment of a strong emotion to the brand is called 'emotional branding' (Rossiter and Bellman 2012). Some brands are so successful in emotional branding that they attain the status of 'iconic brands' or 'cultural icons' (Holt 2004). Nostalgia for childhood, which is usually perceived as a time of joy and happiness, is hence a strong emotion that can be used for emotional branding (Havlena and Holak 1991; 1998; Holak, Matveev and Havlena 2007). By relying on

positive emotions and sentimental or ironic moods, the brand creates very strong connections with its customers. Positive emotions and light-hearted attitudes become both the signifiers of success in life and the new values one has to pursue in order to be happy. The designer's goal is not to revive real history but rather to outfit customers with a decorative, cool façade in order to secure brand recognition and succeed in the market. The selection of symbols used by the brand implies that there is a positive side to these symbols; it simplifies their meanings, and hence that of the epoch the symbols are related to. The designer's irony is present in the collections, and sometimes seems to be accompanied by sentimental emotions towards the past because of the elements he chooses. The synopsis of the historical epoch may not always be the historically correct one, but is rather a more or less fictional one, simplified for the perception of individuals living today.

To use Jameson's and Grainge's terminology, Denis Simachev's fashions are a good example of a nostalgic mode which 'is divorced from any necessary, or properly existential, sense of longing, loss, or even memory' (Grainge 2002, 6). In this case, Denis Simachev's fashions maintain a relation to nostalgia in its postmodernist sense of style, but are hardly an example of dealing with history, crisis or amnesia. Fashion hardly allows a 'correct' image of history with all its complexities, tragedies and traumas. Fashion is a commercial activity which has profit as a main goal. However, what the designer and his team attempted to do is to bring back the memories and cultural elements that Russian people had begun to forget, weaving them into the collective identity as produced by means of fashion design. This is a good example of how the nostalgic mode is able to negotiate memory and identity. Basically, contrary to what Jameson thought, the nostalgic mode of the Denis Simachev brand produces meaningful narratives through recycling past symbols.

6.4.2. Nostalgia in the Eye of the Beholder

During the interviews I asked both the designer and his art director whether they would say the brand can be called nostalgic and/or whether they themselves experience any nostalgia for the period. Like the owner of the Petrovich restaurant and the producers of the television programmes I have analysed, they both deny experiencing any nostalgia for the past (Simachev 2012; Makarov 2013), although they agree that they

‘strongly sympathise’ with the last years of the Soviet Union.¹⁸ Ivan Makarov suggests that material markers (monuments, buildings, interiors etc.) and emotional structures (behavioural and emotional characteristics of *homo sovieticus*) were present on many different levels in contemporary Russian society and that it was impossible to overlook them while working on the collections because fashion, he believes, is a mirror of whatever happens in society (Makarov 2013). One did not have to be nostalgic for the Soviet times since the Soviet ‘aura’ has never disappeared from the fabric of day-to-day life. They both suggest that it is up to the customers how to interpret the designs. If people are prone to nostalgia, then they will see nostalgia in the designs of the brand.

According to the brand’s market research, the age of its customers ranges from 13 to 70 years (Simachev 2012). The brand attracts three generations. Those who were children at the time when the brand emerged on the market – Simachev calls them ‘children’ – have grown up together with the brand over the past ten years. Born during perestroika and in the early 1990s, they were in their teens in the early 2000s, and now they have turned into successful young entrepreneurs with families. They purchase the Denis Simachev label and are involved in the game called ‘I am from the USSR and I think it’s cool!’

These children grasp the emotional part, the image, the colours and some superficial meanings. They take it as a basis, they like it. When they are asked, ‘What do you like about this?’ they say, ‘Well, it’s funny. We like it!’ They can’t really explain, and more than half of them don’t know my basic themes, that is, they can’t read them, they can’t understand what is being said. But they like how it’s fed, how it’s done. (Simachev 2012)

Meanwhile, according to Simachev, an older generation aged 25–35 years, the same age as he was when he started his enterprise, can read his cultural references and reflect upon them as he does. ‘In principle, they think like me. And they realise that everything, each message I put into the object, always has a false bottom. I always have one hand behind my back, I like to say’ (Simachev 2012). This group of customers remembers the Soviet Union as the time of their childhood, which may explain their positive attitude towards the Soviet era. In the 2000s they were young and

¹⁸ For the full interview, see <http://gorod.afisha.ru/archive/8316/> (in Russian).

ambitious, well off and educated, united by the same values and preferences. They were born during the age of shortages and were dying for Western imports. Now the situation in Russia has changed. 'At first, the people of my generation wanted to try those things that our parents could not, but now that we have been everywhere, we are coming back to our roots', said one of the most influential people in the fashion world, the journalist Evelina Khromtchenko (quoted in Singer 2007). At the same time, this generation looks at Soviet times through the prism of cynicism and irony: they do not want to go back, but at the same time they can be reflective about it. And, more importantly, they mock it for fun.

Another group of customers who are much older than the first two groups can experience nostalgia provoked by the imagery of the brand, Simachev says. This group is more prone to nostalgia than the other two:

The older ones – their fathers – they, of course, see more nostalgia in my creative work. That is, they evaluate it as a kind of return to a time that was cool for them, especially since I'm only picking some funny, cool themes to use as a basis. And they always have a nice smile and warm memories [about these themes]. And they don't really look deeply into that. (Simachev 2012)

The designer attributes agency to his consumers who, in his opinion, are capable of constructing the new meanings of the garments. That is particularly interesting when we return to the theme of nostalgia to define who the agent is who can label something nostalgic. In the designer's view, it is up to the viewer to construct the meaning and define whether there is something nostalgic in the object or not. 'That is, the children look at the pictures, they [the older generation] look at their past, and the generation in the middle see it as sort of the essence, and begin to divide into camps, some are for it and others are against it, and they begin to communicate' (Simachev 2012). An object based on references to the past can evoke a nostalgic sentiment in the subject. At the same time, the polysemic codes of the Denis Simachev brand create a wide field for reflections, discussions and debate, both between different generations and in society in general. Depending on what they know about Russian culture and attitudes to the past, viewers interpret the visual representations of the past differently, from simply 'being cool' to 'being nostalgic'. One might also say that this is the point where nostalgia as a *mood*, understood as 'a feeling determined by a concept of longing and loss', 'a

particular conception of the past, thought to be more stable and complete', meets nostalgia as a *mode*, 'a consumable style', 'an aesthetic register with a far more indiscriminate relationship with the past' (Grainge 2002, 10, 41). At the production end, nostalgia is a mode, while at the consumption end one may encounter nostalgia as a mood. Even if a producer sees his or her production only in aesthetic terms, a consumer might find in that production a reflection of his or her experience of longing, feelings and emotions that bind him or her with the past.

6.5. The Fashion Brand Shapovalova and the Political Use of the Past

The Shapovalova brand was also launched in the 2000s, but was more of a political project than late Soviet youth subcultures or the Denis Simachev brand, promoting a mixture of state patriotism and a cult of personal happiness. This particular brand is interesting due to the designer's unique position in the Russian fashion market. Antonina Shapovalova was one of the commissars of the pro-Kremlin youth movement *Nashi*, a youth movement managed by the state. I will first briefly introduce the Nashi youth movement before analysing the designs of the Antonina Shapovalova brand from the perspective of what I shall call 'patriotism management', a political project realised in part through creative industries and composed of centrally organised efforts to install patriotic feelings in young citizens. Patriotism management includes planning, organising, staffing, leading and controlling such an initiative. The Shapovalova brand was one of the projects and visual manifestations of patriotism management. In the following sections I will clarify how these manifestations worked.

6.5.1. The Nashi Youth Movement

The Nashi youth movement was officially launched in 2005 as a response to the Ukrainian Orange revolution of 2004 (Shevchuk, Kamishev 2005).¹⁹

¹⁹ Nashi's official title is Obshcherossiiskaia obshchestvennaia organizatsiia sodeistviia razvitiu suverennoi demokratii molodezhnoe dvizhenie 'Nashi' ('All-Russian civil organisation for the promotion and development of sovereign democracy – "Nashi" youth movement'). See www.nashi.su. Youth movements in Russia began to emerge around the mid-2000s. In the beginning there were many, most of them affiliated with existing political parties across the political spectrum. At the time Nashi was founded,

Nashi claimed to be an anti-fascist organisation (subsuming communists and liberals under the term ‘fascists’) supporting President Vladimir Putin in his battle against the oligarchs (Rosbalt 2005). In 2008, the movement was reformed: many programmes were cut and the work of many regional branches was discontinued (Savina, Taratuta and Shevchuk 2008). There may have been several reasons for this reorganisation. First of all, after the presidential elections of 2008, when the threat of anti-government protests was nearly zero, there was no need for such a large organisational structure (Savina, Taratuta and Shevchuk 2008).²⁰ Second, the ambiguous and aggressive actions of Nashi, especially the scandals over calls to demolish the Estonian embassy and the protests over the removal of the Bronze Soldier in Tallinn, did not do much good to Russia’s image on the international stage (Laruelle 2011; Lassila 2011). Nonetheless, the movement continued to grow, and during the parliamentary and presidential election campaign of 2011–2012, when there was a need to manage pro-presidential demonstrations to counterbalance liberal protests in Moscow after alleged fraud during the elections, Nashi once again proved useful to the regime.²¹ With time it became evident that the project had to be rebranded or closed down. In 2012 its leader Vasilii Iakimenko declared that the history of the movement in its existing form had ended, and a new political party would be founded to succeed it. In 2013 it was decided to develop smaller projects with clear objectives aimed at promoting patriotism under the umbrella organisation *Vserossiiskoe Sobschestvo Molodezhi* (‘All-Russian Youth Association’).²²

The majority of Nashi members were young people, mostly first-year university students. As a youth organisation designed both to organise leisure activities and to help young people from the provinces to establish themselves and build careers, Nashi had a lot to offer. Nashi’s activities included an wide variety of projects ranging from fund-raising campaigns

there were two other pro-Kremlin youth movements: *Molodaia Gvardiia* (‘The young guard’) and *Rossiia Molodaia* (‘Young Russia’).

²⁰ The Orange Revolution refers to a movement of popular protest and civil resistance in Ukraine during and after the presidential elections of 2004, which were believed to have been marred by corruption.

²¹ For example, during the protests against the ‘Dima Iakovlev law’ prohibiting American citizens from adopting Russian orphans, the members of the movement organised provocations (Kichanova 2013). Nashi also sent its members from the provinces to Moscow during the elections (Bazarova 2012).

²² For more information about the rebranding of the movement, see Solomonova (2013) or Sivkova (2013).

to benefit orphanages and educational initiatives to pro-presidential support and the organisation of mass demonstrations. Those who joined the movement stressed the opportunities Nashi offered for self-realisation, leadership experience and the opportunity to earn a second degree at *Vysshaia Shkola Gosudarstvennogo Upravleniia* ('Higher school of state administration'), as well as professional networks, informal communication circles and, of course, careers in politics (Lassila 2011).

One important motive of the establishment of Nashi was the state's fear of the unwanted politicisation of youth – that is, political activities that diverged from the Kremlin's interests, and particularly civic engagement like that which had transpired during the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (Stanovaya 2005). 'In this sense, Nashi was meant to function as a certain motivational system within official youth policy – a system in symbiosis with political interests that supported the maintenance of the current political authority' (Lassila 2011, 265). Nashi's political discourse was based on the Kremlin's state patriotism and on the concept of 'sovereign democracy' (Lassila 2011).²³ The project was supposed to manage patriotic sentiments in young people and create the conditions for better control of public opinion. To those ends, a very robust structure was developed. The movement was divided into several projects focusing on patriotic education, healthy life styles and sport, innovations and modernisation, entrepreneurship, anti-corruption campaigns and youth summer camps.

One of the movement's commissars, Antonina Shapovalova, started her own brand as a fashion designer which became a mouthpiece for Nashi's projects.²⁴ For example, Shapovalova launched the production of

²³ The concept of sovereign democracy was believed have originated with Vladislav Surkov, one of the Kremlin's ideologists. It refers to Russia's absolute autonomy to define its own democratic path. For a discussion, see Poliakov (2007).

²⁴ Antonina Shapovalova was born in Moldova in 1987 and received degrees in international relations and textile industry management at Kostroma State Technical University. She then worked in two fashion enterprises before establishing her own designer brand. Shapovalova's first collections were inspired by frequently-used Russian themes: fairy tales, *matreshkas* and Russian folk crafts. The brand's mythology refers to an encounter between Shapovalova and the future president of the Russian Federation, Dmitrii Medvedev, during an annual Nashi summer forum of pro-Kremlin youth at Lake Seliger, at which he instructed her to proceed with her career in fashion design and start her own brand. 'Then the Deputy Prime Minister bought one of Antonina's first t-shirts with a very patriotic, but very provocative slogan: "Reproducing is enjoyable and rewarding!"' (www.shapovalova.ru). Shapovalova's office was located next to Nashi's headquarters in Moscow.

t-shirts with 'patriotic slogans' promoting many of Nashi's ideological campaigns connected to national projects. For example, the catchy slogan *Razmnozhsia priyatno i polezno!* ('Reproducing is enjoyable and rewarding!') tied in with the national campaign to improve Russia's demographic situation. T-shirts with the words 'Join the Army, my friend' were related to a project supporting the Russian Army and aimed at improving the image of military service. Memories of the glorious and victorious past occupied a 'prime spot within the strategies' of Nashi: the movement organised public commemorations of the Great Patriotic War (Laurelle 2011, 234). It comes as no surprise, then, that Shapovalova has launched a collection with clear references to Victory Day celebrations, calling it 'Pobeda No. 22' ('Victory No. 22'), and another dedicated to the symbolic power of the USSR in space, 'Gagarin 2.0'.

6.5.2. The Patriotic Propaganda of the Shapovalova Brand

In view of Antonina Shapovalova's connections with the Nashi movement, I propose to analyse her work as one of the manifestations of the Russian state ideology in the form of visual propaganda. Following Jacques Ellul's classification of propaganda – which distinguishes between agitation propaganda, which serves as a call to action, and integration propaganda, which 'proceeds more slowly, essentially substituting one conceptual framework for another through moral, social and intellectual indoctrination' – Shapovalova's case seems more to fit the definition of integration propaganda because it promotes the ideological doctrine of the state in a very smooth but subtle manner (Ellul 1965/1973, 70–79). However, some of the designs, especially those that include slogans calling for specific action (such as the slogans encouraging people to join the army or to have children), could be interpreted as agitation propaganda. The main message of the Shapovalova brand is patriotism, understood in popular terms as love for one's country and in scholarly discourse as 'the popularisation of a national idea, intended to bring the state's population together in a common bond of support for the current regime' (Sperling 2009, 236).²⁵ It is essential to examine the content of patriotic messages since 'the content of patriotism may well determine in which direction the

²⁵ In a 2007 Levada Centre survey, more than 50% of the respondents understood patriotism as 'love of one's country' and around 30% of the respondents believed that patriotism means 'working for the good of one's country'. See Levada Centre (2008).

Russian national idea turns', and as research shows, the Russian state has tried to use the military as a basis for patriotism (Sperling 2009, 236).

It is difficult to classify the brand as overt official or unofficial propaganda. Antonina Shapovalova never made a secret of her involvement in the Nashi movement and her contacts with the Kremlin administration. She also made public her connection with another youth movement *Idushchie Vmeste* [Moving Together], which used nostalgia for the socialist past to gain public acceptance (Nadkarni and Shevchenko 2004, 493). However, the brand is promoted as a free-standing, market-driven project which is sympathetic to the Kremlin ideology and supported by the political elite. For example, when asked about the connections between the brand and the Russian political establishment, the designer admits that there is a connection between her fashions and politics: 'Fashion does not *have* to be political, but it *can* be. Fashion is an active tool of mediation of different ideas, including political ones. Sometimes I am interested in discussing politics, it is sought after in certain periods' (Shapovalova 2013). She also put pictures with Vladimir Putin on her brand's website, and included the figure of Dmitrii Medvedev, President of Russian Federation at the time, in the story of the brand's founding.

Admitting that her fashions have a 'propaganda mission', Shapovalova points out that there is 'nothing wrong' with that because her propaganda is 'positive', being aimed at advancing social harmony and fostering a moral value system, and has an educational purpose. It mediates the 'right' propaganda messages, which mobilise people to work for the greater good of the country they live in – in other words, to be patriotic. Moreover, in her opinion, she is merely following a global trend and using fashion as a platform to express a civic position:

Well, if fashion is patriotic in other countries, why can't it be in our country? There is such a trend nowadays – of using national symbols to state one's civic position (*grazhdanskaia pozitsiia*) through creativity. It is popular and therefore stirs designers' interest. (Shapovalova 2013)

The idea of patriotism mediated by the designs of Antonina Shapovalova is based on the positive assertion of Russia's past, present and future. An appeal to a positive image of the past is one of the features of the brand.

As I have shown in this and the previous chapters, the positive reassessment of the Soviet past was visible as early as the late 1990s. At that time, the positive image of the past was closely connected to the nostalgia for childhood and youth experienced by the generations who had grown up during the Brezhnev period of stagnation. The youth activists to whom Antonina Shapovalova belongs have no direct personal memories of the Soviet past. Instead, they operate with post-memories and collective memories shared through textbooks, films and social networking sites. They are nostalgic for the times they never experienced personally, times of which they only have a popular-culture image produced by various media. Many of these young people matured during the time when Vladimir Putin came to power and reinstated the symbols of the Soviet state – the national anthem, wreath emblem, etc. – and the official commemorations of the Great Patriotic War.²⁶

In the 2000s, state memory policy accentuated stronger control over debates about the memory of World War II and the legacy of the Soviet Union, and Vladimir Putin stated that ‘the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century’ (Putin 2005).²⁷ A ferocious campaign launched in the mid-2000s to denounce so-called

²⁶ In Russian historiography, the established norms for the treatment of the events of 1939–1945 are different from the Western tradition. ‘World War II’ is framed chronologically between September 1, 1939, and September 2, 1945, while the ‘Great Patriotic War’ is dated from June 22, 1941, to May 9, 1945 (Kangaspuro 2011, 302). The term ‘patriotic’ here (*otechestvennaia*) stands for *otechestvo*, ‘fatherland’, and the war is understood as war of defence of the homeland. The term originates in discourses of the ‘1812 Patriotic War’, the war between tsarist Russia and Napoleon’s France. The reference to the Patriotic War of 1812 was seen as a great morale booster, and was intended to motivate the Soviet people to stand up for their country and destroy the invader, as well as to justify the acts of Soviet foreign policy and legitimise the role of the USSR as the main redeemer of Europe. The term ‘Great Patriotic War’ refers to the Eastern Front of the Second World War between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany with its allies. It appeared in the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* in the headline ‘The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet People’ (*Velikaia Otechestvennaia Voina sovetskogo naroda*) on June 23, 1941, the day after Germany invaded the Soviet Union. The historian Nina Tumarkin has written that, in the USSR, ‘commemoration of the war, whether artistically or ceremonially, became a quasi-religious rite, especially pronounced after Stalin’s death in 1953 and the abrupt end of the Stalin cult’ (Tumarkin 2003, 595). ‘During Brezhnev, the cult of the Great Patriotic War reached oversized proportions: from an intimate unofficial holiday it turned into grand parades and official performances. As the Soviet Union declined and finally expired, memory of the war became highly contested, as ugly truths about the war were made public’ (Tumarkin 2003, 595).

²⁷ On the role of the state in the construction of collective memory, see e.g. Kiselev (2004) or J. Zajda and R. Zajda (2005).

'falsifiers of history' resulted in the production of several 'objective' school textbooks in which Stalinist crimes, for example, were excused in the name of the need to modernise the Soviet Union.²⁸ In 2008, Memorial, an NGO dedicated to human rights, was accused of 'spreading a distorted view of national history – in particular of Stalinism' (Laruelle 2011, 235). Soon afterwards, Sergei Shoigu, the Minister of Emergency Situations, suggested that it should be considered criminal to criticise the Soviet victory, and the deputies of the presidential party proposed the History and Memory Bill which would have made rehabilitations of Nazism, accusations against the Allied Forces, and misrepresentations of the Nuremberg trials' outcome crimes punishable by imprisonment.²⁹ In school textbooks, the period of the 1990s was evaluated as 'controversial', with mostly negative assessments, while the rule of Vladimir Putin was seen mainly in a positive light (Levintova and Butterfield 2010).

These 'ideological shifts' which started in Russia in the early 2000s which were 'expressed in the construction of the "vertical of power" and "managed democracy" intensified the process of creating a positive discourse of collective identity based on the unity of the whole people around the nation's history, national traditions, national values' and influenced the young generations' image of the past (Zvereva 2008, 15).³⁰ This positive evaluation of the past is best seen in the collection 'Pobeda No. 22'.³¹ Antonina Shapovalova's Fall–Winter 2010–2011 collection 'Pobeda No. 22' followed the global trend of using military themes as inspiration for sartorial objects.³² However, her treatment of military

²⁸ See e.g. Filippov (2005).

²⁹ For more information on the debates about the memory laws, see Koposov (2009) and Koposov (2010). These legislative initiatives did not become laws until 2014, when, on the initiative of Irina Iarovaia, one of the deputies of United Russia, the Russian State Duma passed a law providing for up to five years in prison for the 'rehabilitation of Nazism'. Human rights defenders fear that the law's vague formulation might lead to the prosecution of historians and journalists who research different versions of the events of World War II. For a discussion see Aleksei Il'in, (2014).

³⁰ For the research on the continuity between what students learn at school and what they believe, and on attitudes to the past among pro-Kremlin youth, see Ekaterina Levintova and Jim Butterfield (2010).

³¹ *Pobeda* is Russian for 'victory'; the '22' refers to the designer's age. The title of the collection thus suggests a personal victory while playing on Victory Day.

³² In 2007, the Libyan designer Basma Ebara created a camouflage collection which challenged social and political norms of femininity. Military uniforms dominated the Spring–Summer 2010 and Autumn–Winter 2010 collections of Burberry Prorsum, Marc by Marc Jacobs, Junya Watanabe and Wunderkind, in which masculinity and

uniforms and the war theme was different: she resurrected the glamour and sexuality of military uniforms and wove them into the fabric of national identity and 'love of one's country'. The description of her collection stated that the main theme was 'a symbol of victory, determination for the future', but not a war (www.shapovalova.ru).

Shapovalova's design is a glamorous interpretation of the original military uniforms. The collection 'Pobeda No. 22' was presented by young, smiling, beautiful warriors in military suede jackets and modified uniform coats, and by stunning female models in fleeting crêpe-de-chine dresses, flared skirts and open bodices that exposed perfect bodies, emphasising the hips and legs of Slavic-looking models. Blood-coloured make-up on the naked legs of the female models added to the erotic glamorisation of their images. The garments resemble the originals in the use of khaki and dark blue, double-breasted overcoats and jackets, and knee-length dresses. These designs have little in common with the highly utilitarian fashion of the war period. They correspond more to the postwar hunger for glamour and the elegance of Dior's 'New Look', and seem to call more for traditional femininity than for the image of an emancipated strong and determined woman.³³ Themes of strength and power were in fact emphasised through aggressive female sexuality expressed in exposed, half-naked bodies. Massive ankle boots with a double heel over coarse woollen socks and outdoor shoes based on soldiers' boots signified protection and comfort attained by power and physical strength. A number of decorative elements such as chains, metal studs and rivets, sequins, rough edges, geometric shapes and blackened gold, added playfulness and naivety to the images in the collection. T-shirt prints, a hallmark of the Shapovalova brand, were decorated with the number 65 and the aphoristic phrases 'Depreciation of the heart', 'You gotta join the army, my friend!' and 'War is not a game'. The St. George ribbon T-shirt utilised the main symbol of the state-supported campaign

functionality were materialised in olive drab colours, greatcoats, military jackets and aviator or military boots. In March 2010, the US issue of *Vogue* magazine presented current evolution of the military fashion trend, which abandoned the glamour of previous years for interpretations of 19th century military dress, addressing issues of power in a new contemporary context.

³³ The artist Alexander Petlura stressed that, after the war, people were more attracted to bright colours and more sensual dress shapes. They decorated garments with symbols of victory and embroideries of fireworks and flowers (Petlura 2012).

'St. George Ribbon 2010'.³⁴ T-shirt prints in the collection playfully suggested a positive image of the Russian Army, constructing a connection between past heroism and current aspirations for glory. Shapovalova called on young people to join others on the road to inevitable victory, 'triumphant victory, a victory as a commitment to excellence' (www.shapovalova.ru).

In this glamour of the victorious past, of generous and compassionate love for Russia, and of national pride for the fatherland, Shapovalova introduces a symbolic figure of the country's leader:

My grandfather, Vladimir Romanov, a military pilot, was only 20 years old when he took part in the legendary operation 'Lights over Berlin'. The Germans were already near Smolensk and about to celebrate their success. Then Stalin ordered an attack on Berlin. To trick Hitler, he ordered a team of young pilots which included my grandfather to the island Osel in the Baltic Sea, from whence they reached the outskirts of Berlin and dropped their bombs. Hitler thought it was Churchill who had attacked him. When they understood the situation, they started to attack the bombers. Many planes were destroyed, but luckily my grandfather survived. I think everyone should remember history. (Quoted in Redreeva 2011)

Shapovalova's story about the Soviet military attack of August 1941, which had an important psychological effect on the Soviet forces despite its marginal effect on the German war machine, has no negative connotations and presents Stalin as an ingenious general and a caring father who saved the nation. This mythic view of Stalin reveals highly ambiguous contemporary interpretations. Markku Kangaspuro wrote, after Medvedev's statements in connection with the 65th Victory Day celebrations, that the de-Stalinisation of Russia had started in 2010 and Russia was writing itself into the European future (Kangaspuro 2011). Only two years later, polls showed that public opinions were changing dramatically. In 1998, 60 per cent of Russians evaluated Stalin negatively,

³⁴ The campaign was launched to celebrate the 65th anniversary of Victory Day in Russia and abroad and ended on May 10, 2010. The campaign recalled the Great Victory to those for whom the war was only a page in a history textbook. The objectives of 'St. George Ribbon 2010' were to revive historical traditions, to consolidate Russian society and to preserve the historical memory of the Great Patriotic War. President Dmitrii Medvedev, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, and all the guests of the Victory Parade in Moscow on May 9, 2010, showed their support of the action by wearing St. George ribbons.

but in 2012, only 22 per cent shared this opinion while 48 per cent thought Stalin played a positive role in Russian history. Lev Gudkov, the head of the Levada Centre for public opinion and sociological research in Moscow, links these perceptions to a decline in knowledge about that period of the country's history. During the last 25 years the percentage of those who knew nothing about the Stalin era increased from 30 per cent to 70 per cent. Lev Gudkov concluded that the young Russian population's historical ignorance about the tragedies of the totalitarian regime, together with the new ideology, creates a dangerous situation (Levada Centre 2012). The sociologist Dmitrii Dubin saw a danger of this myth pervading the minds of younger generations who did not experience the Soviet Union (2013). A positive evaluation of Stalin can be seen on Russian social networking sites. Young people in most of the relevant groups believe that Stalin was a 'good manager' who was able to turn the Soviet Union into an industrialised world power (Morenkova 2012). In such a context, Shapovalova's position is symbolic.

Somehow the shadow of Josef Stalin is echoed in the presence in the collection of another political figure – Vladimir Putin. Shapovalova suggests him as the best role model and a perfect lover, which is, needless to say, goes hand in hand with the overall glamourisation of Putin's figure (Goscilo 2013; Menzel 2013). Her overidentification with the figure of Vladimir Putin makes it impossible to tell whether she sincerely supports him, subtly ridicules him, or does both in a peculiar mix. Although, reading her designs against her political background allows us to see that the irony that she is hiding behind is just a curtain for a very subtle political message of personality cult. She reproduces in a slightly grotesque way the slogans of Nashi campaigns as well as the name of the country's leader, Vladimir Putin. Vladimir Putin, then prime minister, appeared in Shapovalova's collections, on underwear with slogans such as 'PUTin the Best' and *Volodia, ia s toboi* ('Volodia [a diminutive for Vladimir], I am with you'). Putin's figure in the collection is more charged with sexual connotations than Dmitrii Medvedev's, who at that time was the president of Russia (he appears on t-shirts with the slogan *President nam v pomoshch'* ('The President is our helper')). Shapovalova's heroine identified with nature, nurturing, sensuality, emotion and seductive sexuality, is waiting for the perfect macho man, a man of strength, modernism and the future, was 'full of erotic dreams'. Vladimir Putin is

hence presented as a perfect macho-hero, expecting young, beautiful and vital women to make their sacrifices to the country (Coscilo 2013).

The optimistic image of the present and future is best illustrated by another collection, that of Spring–Summer 2012, titled ‘Gagarin 2.0’ after the cosmonaut Iurii Gagarin, a Soviet national hero. The number 2.0 in the title of the collection signifies a new, updated product version and the idea of a better, more advanced future. The promotional campaign for the collection presented a beautiful, dream-like blond designer looking at fashion show guests. Two blond young males dressed in yellow and red summer garments and leaning on a toy horse stand in a field of flowers. A medieval fairy-tale castle overlooks a green valley with leaping white horses and unicorns. A fairy-tale-like wooden sailing boat floats in a calm bay, while birds and a spacecraft explore the blue sky. The stage for the performance was decorated as a village road alongside a blooming tulip field with an image of a booming metropolis in the background. The press release states, ‘All current and urgent matters are somewhere far away ... Overwhelming sincerity, a sunset which dazzles with its beauty, actions that become historical – this is the world that awaits us’ (www.shapovalova.ru). The designer calls for living in the present day, ‘doing stupid things’, becoming pilots, poets, sincere romantics, caring fathers and sensual lovers. Women are presented as seductively unreachable and at the same time sincere and open. ‘Fleeting, bright, eternally beautiful, with burning eyes gazing into a far-away, enormous world, inspired and enlightened, they could wait for ever for Prince Charming and believe in his sincere love, romantic heroism and desperate altruism’ (www.shapovalova.ru). Shapovalova invites us to a *locus amoenus*, a kind of Arcadia, a land of idleness and luxury, which exists somewhere between the past, present and future.³⁵ In a way it is an alternative present, built on joyful images and directed towards the future. In the centre of this utopia, a fairyland where unusual, magical things happen, is Russia. Shapovalova presents a model of a utopian world while also embodying the utopian feelings that can stimulate consumers’ identification. Her task can be seen as that of convincing her customers that, in spite of current hardships and pessimistic projections for the future, life can be as described in her joyful

³⁵ *Locus amoenus* comes from the Latin for *pleasant place* and refers to an idealised place of comfort, with connotations of Eden. Such a place is usually imagined with three basic elements: trees, grass, and water. Often the concept highlights the differences between city and countryside.

press releases and as presented on the catwalk. The catwalk fashion show works to reenact utopian visions; the main characters are depersonalised and universalised as in a fairy tale.

Shapovalova's propaganda of the Kremlin's patriotic ideology works in a very delicate way, and in addition to the strategies mentioned here, it also involves mechanisms familiar from other chapters. Antonina Shapovalova follows the late-Soviet Russian tradition of *steb* described in the previous sections of this chapter in relation to subcultures and the designs of Denis Simachev. However, while the subculture used *steb* as an effective strategy to mock the Soviet regime, in a pro-state movement that promotes the official, patriotic line, *steb* seems to be a highly controversial and complex strategy to use.

The designer not only admits that her designs are propagandistic, but overidentifies with the idea of propaganda and ridicules it. By making the viewer believe that her work is just a harmless joke, the designer induces the viewer or consumer to let his or her guard down and assume that it is not propaganda. Shapovalova's second step is to claim that her collections are 'provocative'. The word is usually understood as a negative attribute, indicating an action committed to cause a strong reaction by creating a difficult situation or consequences for the one being provoked. In this case, however, provocation is seen as a positive act directed towards mobilising young people to be more active in the life of the country:

Provocative prints are present in my collections. But often it is correct, 'healthy' provocation, for example the *Razmnozhsia priiatno i polezno!* ['Reproducing is enjoyable and profitable!'] t-shirts, which arouse ideas of starting a family. Or for example the t-shirts with the slogans *Khvatit bukhat!* ['Enough drinking!'] or *Khvatit zhrat!* ['Enough eating!'], which 'provoke' people to start taking care of their health and do sports. (Shapovalova 2013)

These slogans presuppose that young Russians are under the total control and negative influence of consumerist values which supplanted the previously existing value system in which morality, altruism and spirituality were at the top of the hierarchy. Shapovalova calls on people to mobilise and to start working for the future wealth of the country. However, this mobilisation is supposed be ideologically 'correct' – activities should fall within the ideological guidelines laid out by the youth movement and the ruling party. Such open agitation might scare some young

people, so Shapovalova says at the same time that it is only a joke, although with a grain of truth in it: 'Every print is a joke, and, as we know, there is a part of truth in every joke!' (Shapovalova 2013).

Shapovalova attempts to politically engage young people in Russia, who were rather apolitical for a long time (Lassila 2011). In doing so, she follows Nashi's strategy of promoting an active civic position as a fun, cheerful and responsible outlook on life. The creation of a feeling of political, economic and social stability, the propagation of positive thinking among customers of the brand, and active support for the president, while discouraging an oppositional 'loser mentality' are the features of Shapovalova's fashion campaign:

It [patriotism] is also right and good. Patriotism should not be in *matreshka* and in *gzhel* decorations, but in a dignified civic position. Evidently, in my brand everything is in place and that is why it is called patriotic. (Shapovalova 2013)

One does not necessarily have to protest or fight in order to show where one stands. There are other ways of stating one's civic position: through creativity or through the articulation of national symbols and operation with visual codes – which indeed make the idea of patriotism much more attractive. In addition, Shapovalova skilfully turns the criticism of banal forms of patriotic manifestations, such as the well-known Russian *matreshka* dolls and other traditional symbols, to her own advantage by calling for a more 'correct' and active involvement. Through the discourse of Victory Day and the Great Patriotic War, she introduced the idea of individual sacrifice for the greater good of the whole country. The brand exhorts its audience to 'make sacrifices' for the sake of their country – women to give birth, men to serve in the army. Thus it promotes a can-do attitude supported by a supreme faith in the country's future and a conviction that the prescribed action will ultimately bring victory.

Shapovalova skilfully used the growing criticism of the official celebrations of the Victory Day in Russia. During Putin's rule, the official celebrations seemed to reach their zenith, and many people complained that such an important event was becoming a mass television spectacle deprived of any personal meaning (Zvereva 2005). Shapovalova seemed to be very critical towards these over-the-top celebrations and called for a more sincere attitude towards the event. She stressed that her collection promoted sincerity which, according to her, seems to be lost nowadays:

It so happens that lately we perceive the celebration of Victory too formally. For 65 years, an emotional message has been weakened and is now broadcast more out of inertia, not from the heart. In this collection, I want to focus on the personal attitude to victory, to think about the place of heroism in the context of day-to-day life. (www.shapovalova.ru)

Shapovalova frequently invokes sincerity as an important value which Russians have lost, but should have among their principal virtues. By excavating memories of the Great Patriotic War, Shapovalova indirectly looks back on and romanticises Soviet times by searching for sincerity there. This sincerity had two related but distinct meanings: as a way to explore life in the past (in this case, the Soviet past), and as an intrinsic characteristic of that life itself: 'In both these senses, sincerity is further related to a set of other terms: idealism, romanticism, humanism, purity, friendship, comradeship, self-sacrifice, etc.' (Yurchak 2008, 257). Thus Shapovalova taps into the general trend of changing attitudes towards the Soviet past. Whereas many of the attitudes towards the socialist past in the 1990s and 2000s were dominated by the aesthetics of irony, by 2008, 'the shift from cynicism to new sincerity, with a touch of warm irony' occurred in many art forms, as well as in youth and popular culture (Yurchak 2008, 259). But there is a slight paradox in Shapovalova's case. Despite her proclaimed sincerity and emotional response, Shapovalova in fact glamorised the war and contributed to narrowing it to the discourse of victory, and in fact took part in the official celebrations. Coinciding with the celebrations of the Victory Day in 2010, Shapovalova's garments became a part of an exhibition dedicated to the Victory and the War. The exhibition *Parade 1945: What the Victory Was Made From*, supported by the ministries of defence and culture and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Federation, illustrates the shifting discourse on the war. The exhibition was built around the presentation of industries that had worked to meet the demands of warfare and everyday life during the war, and focused on the commemoration of key events related to those industries' contributions to the Soviet victory. The exhibition included the products of the Red October, Babaev and Rot Front chocolate factories, which not only supplied the soldiers with chocolate, but also produced coloured smoke bombs. The sense of continuity between past and present was created by a substantial part of the exhibition consisting of modern civilian products which were in one way or another devoted to

the Victory. The Tula factory in Iasnaia Poliana issued printed luxury cakes to commemorate the event. The Stolichnaya vodka distillery presented bottle designs dedicated to various military officials and historical figures. There was also a game room where guests had an opportunity to dive into virtual reenactments and simulators. Meanwhile, the organisers benefited from including Antonina Shapovalova in the programme: she showed several of her glamorous garments as a part of the exhibition, which attracted visitors and underscored the 'peaceful' character of the representation of the Great Patriotic War. In this playful and peaceful way, Shapovalova's designs entered the realm of the Moscow Historical Museum.

Later the same year, several garments from Shapovalova's collection became part of a project dedicated to the commemoration of Victory Day and the Great Patriotic War. The slide show of famous people dressed in garments of the Shapovalova brand was supposed to be broadcast throughout 2010 on screens in airports and train stations all over the country. In this use, Shapovalova's fashions were called upon, not to reflect on the war, but to attract the viewers' attention to the moment of victory and stir patriotic sentiments by making the past elegant and fashionable. In this light, the Shapovalova brand is an example of the glamorisation of wartime representations. Indeed there seems to be an aesthetic of some kind of *war glamour*, a new version of representations of the Great Patriotic War combined with Russian glamour of Vladimir Putin's leadership (Coscilo and Strukov 2011) which becomes a substitute for the Russian national idea. According to the Oxford dictionary definition, glamor is 'an attractive and exciting quality, especially sexual allure' which apparently made a new appearance before the 2008 presidential election (Menzel 2011, 6), and not least in Antonina Shapovalova's designs. Shapovalova's war glamour appears to be a mixture of exclusiveness of the Kremlin elites and vulgarity of the masses (V. Zvereva 2008), by both providing a connection between the high-ranking politicians and Kremlin-friendly celebrities and provincial youth joining the ranks of Nashi. This duality of the brand is well illustrated through the combination of the sexual evening garments with propaganda t-shirts with catchy slogans. It promises the masses access to wealth and power of elites through sacrifice and devotion, and the theme of war serves well this purpose. Certainly, warfare cannot be attractive, so Shapovalova turns

war into a game and a glamorous event, where blood becomes an accessory and tragedy of the war is in the past. The imagery of Shapovalova's catwalk, with fleeting dresses in the women's line, creates a myth of a distant past and projects it into an alternative present or future where wars are, or will be, victorious and death impossible. Shapovalova's designs focus dramatically not only on the tantalising promises of a utopian future, but more importantly on the utopian version of the past. They offer a reenacted and renewed optimism that is prevalent in propaganda images after the war. Just many artists and designers opened up in the past to revolutionary ideas and propaganda, Shapovalova has responded to the call to work towards the country's restoration after 'the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century' and the supposed anarchy of the 1990s. The restoration of the powerful empire and positive outlook required coming to terms with the country's past. As Kathleen Smith emphasises in her book on mythmaking in Yeltsin's Russia, Russian memory politics turned, during the 1990s and even more during Putin's rule, away from letting the voices of the victims be heard and punishing the perpetrators, towards collective amnesia and reconciliation through active forgetting (2002). Looking backward to the victorious achievements of the imperial past mirrors the aspiration to look forward to a bright future by ignoring the hardships of the present. Shapovalova has created a very popular, futuristic fantasy, projected forward from achievements of the past, notably the victory in the Great Patriotic War. In Shapovalova's interpretation, the romanticised and glamorous war culminated in the great victory which paved the way towards a bright future. In these two collections, Russia's past was a continuous Golden Age, and Stalin was a great father and victorious general who led Russia into the new era. This utopian version of the past leads to a similarly utopian version of the present and of the future.

The easy language and immediacy of the imagery makes a direct appeal to an emotional rather than intellectual response. Targeting predominantly young people, Shapovalova's fashion designs intensify myths about World War II and facilitate the mobilisation of the state ideology in which the authority of the present dictates a certain presentation of the past. In contrast to the second-hand clothes found at flea markets stalls (and used by artists such as Alexander Petlura, who believed that these garments breathe history and allow us to become part of history by wearing them, or by re-enactment groups whose members believe that

wearing the original garments stimulates and enhances the experience of the events by materialising them), modern design creates, not a connection with history, but the illusion of such a connection. As a new fashion product, which does not transport a conscious memory of former users and has none of the strangeness of old clothes, which unavoidably exists in the case of vintage and reenactment dress and deepens the gap between the past and the present, Shapovalova's design has the potential to appeal to mainstream customers. The strangeness of the past also is minimised by the removal of all negative memories, while only positive emotions are sold for consumption. At the same time, there is another alluring duality in the Shapovalova brand: it simultaneously lays claim to historicity and denies that it does so by hiding behind a notion of fashion as something superficial. In this way fashion becomes a perfect weapon of manipulation: it disarms its viewer and then mediates its message still more effectively than any pamphlet or speech would have done.

6.6. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have examined how a structure of feeling and the changes in that structure have become visible in fashion practices. I have analysed three examples in which designers and artists used the Soviet theme as their reference material.

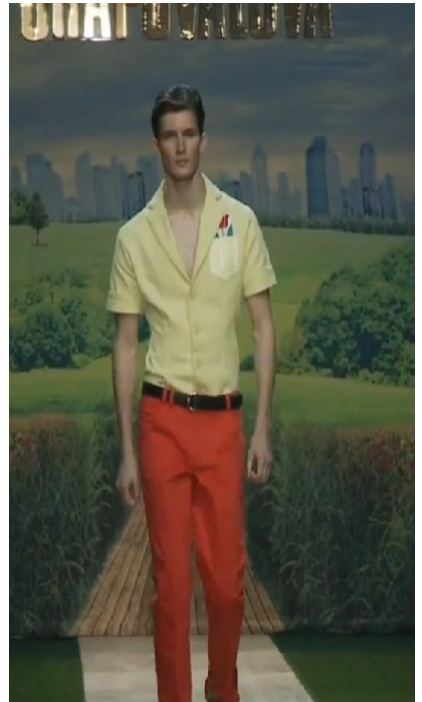
We saw first how subculture groups in Moscow in the 1980s used discarded clothing to express their protest against the Soviet system. With an ironic approach to the symbols of Soviet power, they managed to show its absurdity and question its legitimacy. For them, nostalgia for the Soviet past was a strategy against forgetting the nature of the Soviet epoch. In the mid-1990s, when the country was rapidly changing and this underground movement slowly died out, only a few artists continued to experiment with the dress of the Soviet period. Thanks to informal networks of designers and artists, the old strategies of *steb* and irony, along with knowledge about Soviet material culture, were passed down to a younger generation. However, as Raymond Williams points out, a structure of feeling is impossible to inherit. It will always change with a new generation. The new political and socio-economic conditions of the early 2000s dictated new rules of the game. In order to be recognised on a global fashion market, Russian designers turned to national history, but stripped that history of any negative, controversial and problematic elements and

left only the positive memories that might generate strong emotional responses in customers. Nostalgic longing for the time of childhood was exploited by the market economy. Playing on sentiments and emotions, Denis Simachev turned the Soviet past into a fashionable fetish and nostalgia into emotional economy.

Another change of the structure of feeling occurred some time between the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 and the third presidential term of Vladimir Putin. The Soviet past was then invoked to educate youth in patriotism and loyalty to the regime. Having no direct personal experience of the Soviet Union, but fed mainly collective myths and virtual memories of the past, a new generation of Russians born in the 1990s saw the Soviet past (and especially the Soviet victory in the Great Patriotic War and the Brezhnev period of stagnation) as a time of stability and pride. A longing for past moments of pride and victory became a basis for the growing emotional politics of patriotism.

Interviews in particular give us insight into how fashion producers themselves understand the working of nostalgia. Denis Simachev for example points out that nostalgia lies in interpretation: an object cannot be nostalgic in itself; it is the agent who brings nostalgia to life. An object that refers to the past can evoke a nostalgic sentiment in the subject if the subject is prone to nostalgic experiences.

With regard specifically to the medium of fashion, I would add that these examples show that, despite the widespread belief that fashion and dress are superficial information carriers which do not allow any profound expression, fashion actually has a strong potential for mediating complex messages in society. For commercial success, fashion often builds on collective virtual experiences, i.e. experiences from mass media such as films, television programmes or advertising. If dress and textiles have the power to evoke memories and stories of past experiences, 'stories that need to be told before the wartime generation disappears, not only to inform and share experiences with following generations but also perhaps to restore some of the gaps in cultural history that have opened over the years and to allow suppressed memories to be heard and war traumas to be aired' (Atkins 2005, 21), then the specific character of the Shapovalova brand is that it does not create a platform to reveal suppressed memory and to work through trauma, but instead replays the victory paradigm.



Antonina Shapovalova, collection Gagarin 2.0. Screenshots



Top/Middle/Bottom: Screenshots of the official website of the Denis Simachev brand. Collection Spring/ Summer 2004

7. Digital Nostalgia

The digital age has contributed significantly to the collection and preservation of collective memories. The openness of online space and the opportunities for non-academic, personal expression 'created a favourable environment for diversified memories and historic interpretations' (Morenkova 2012, 39). In Russia in the 1990s, one had to invest a considerable amount of time in searching, accessing, copying and/or buying artefacts, images, videos and information, but since the turn of the century, digital technologies have made it possible to access a vast range of information and cultural material, regardless of one's geographical location or other constraints. Various online archives and online communities dedicated to various aspects of everyday life in the USSR make it possible for anyone to obtain information, anywhere at any time, that before could only be accessed by a personal visit to the institution in question. At the same time, uploading data related to the Soviet past has radically augmented the uses and re-uses of the Soviet cultural heritage, that is, the tangible and intangible artefacts inherited from that period. The convergence of various media, constant access to films, broadcast TV programmes, newspapers and journals, and eyewitness testimonies collected on public forums has created an unprecedented situation in which media producers can create new content without leaving their workplace. One example is the online archive *Nostal'giia Pro: Media Arkhiv Dlia Profi*, which collects media content from national and private archives and includes video material and chronicles for 'professional use' by directors, editors and producers.¹ Ideally, these resources contribute to greater knowledge about the Soviet past among individuals and society at large by making knowledge about the past freely available. However, besides contributing to the process of dismantling myths about the Soviet Union and revealing its secrets, they have also contributed to the increasing mythologising of the Soviet past, making it an utopian place of youth and childhood as well as a 'glorious past' to be constantly longed for (Strukov 2009).

¹ See <http://www.nostalgia-pro.ru/>.

Years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, ‘the reactivated identity search in Russian society is focalised on the construction of the new positive identity, taking roots in a mythologised image of [the] Soviet past’ (Morenkova 2012, 39). During the first decade of the twenty-first century, scholars witnessed a considerable change in attitudes towards the Soviet past in Russian society. Exhausted by the ‘sensational historical disclosures’ that had been popular during the 1980s and 1990s, many Russians became receptive to the incorporation of selected, glorious parts of the Soviet past in a new national patriotic discourse (Morenkova 2012). The state made use of Soviet myths and the Great Patriotic War in particular to mobilise a specific kind of patriotic ‘Russian-Soviet identity’ (Etkind 2009; Scherrer 2007, 192). At the same time, several scholars have pointed to the rapid growth of Soviet nostalgia and mythologising of the past, which progressively replaced history and cultural memory of the Soviet past (Dubin 2009a; Gudkov et al 2008, 11). Many myths are being created online.

By 2012 there were numerous Russian-language online communities in which users uploaded, shared and discussed certain aspects of the Soviet past. For example, two of the most popular Russian-language platforms, the social medium Vkontakte and the blogging service LiveJournal, host several thousand such communities (Morenkova 2012). In this chapter, however, I will examine the online *Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva*. I will look first at the format of the website, and will then illustrate the complexity of relations between users and its producers. In the subsequent discussion I will investigate what happens to memory when the medium changes. To conclude this chapter, I will illustrate how the Soviet past is represented online in the framework of nostalgia.

7.1 *Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva*: Encyclopaedia, Archive or Multimedia Platform?

The website *Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva* (‘Encyclopaedia of our childhood’, <http://e-n-d.ru/>) was launched by the NotaMedia company on October 20, 2005. It was built on the basis of one of the most popular LiveJournal communities, ‘76–82’, with some 14,000 permanent

members and about 10,000 regular readers (Morenkova 2012, 44).² The blog-hosting platform LiveJournal (LJ) has more than eight million users, or approximately 27 per cent of all Russian Internet users (Alexanyan 2009). It is at the centre of Russian social and political online discussions and the primary digital public space (Etling et al. 2010; MacLeod 2009). It hosts more than fifty communities dedicated to discussions of the USSR (Morenkova 2012, 42). There are 'three relatively large and active communities with "anti-Soviet" orientation, while there are thirty-nine "pro-Soviet" communities (groups devoted to the glorification of Stalin, militant patriotic communities, and a segment of seventeen particularly popular nostalgic communities)' (Morenkova 2012, 43). These communities have in common 'an indulgent, positive attitude to Soviet state and society, a favourable appraisal of the key figures of Soviet history, in particular Joseph Stalin, a deep emotional attachment to Soviet symbols and an unconditional celebration of the victory of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War' (Morenkova 2012, 44).

The LiveJournal community '76–82' was founded and run by two people who had a personal interest in founding an open discussion forum in which people born in the USSR could discuss their childhood and life experiences. When it became evident that the project was a success, Adrian Krupchanski and his company approached the founders with a proposal to expand the community and make it into a major website in which all the material collected could be systematised, presented in a 'consumable' form and easily retrieved when needed.³

This website, like the LiveJournal community and the Facebook and V Kontakte groups of the same name (*Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva*),

² The age of the users interested in a given LiveJournal community has a strong correlation with their numbers. For example, the community '62–69' has about 400 users. This also influences the representation of different historical periods online (Morenkova 2012, 44).

³ Seventy-five per cent of the visitors of *Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva* are from Russia. They are responsible for 84 per cent of the site's traffic. In 2013, the website was visited by 663 to 725 users viewing some 1,350 pages daily. Each visitor viewed 2.9 pages a day (see <http://urlshpion.ru/www.76-82.ru#web>). The LiveJournal community '76–82' still exists and is regularly updated, and it is linked to the e-n-d.ru website. According to the information on the community page at the moment of writing, '76–82' had more than 20,500 journal posts and more than 440,000 comments (see http://www.livejournal.com/userinfo.bml?user=76_82). The site statistics in the footnote are for www.76-82.ru. The same site is also accessible as www.e-n-d.ru, and the stats for that URL are much higher (see <http://urlshpion.ru/www.e-n-d.ru>). I don't know if e-n-d.ru was online in 2013 ...]

illustrates well the phenomenon of media convergence – that is, the merging, cooperation and collaboration of previously disparate media platforms and tools for the production and distribution of creative content (Jenkins 2006; Grant and Wilkinson 2009; Erdal 2011). All four of these platforms are connected by links and allow the insertion of YouTube videos directly into posts, thus permitting connections with other media platforms. There is a constant, interchangeable flow of memories and nostalgic sentiments between the platforms.

According to Adrian Krupchanski, the name of the community and the title of the website, *Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva*: 76–82, originates in the fact that the creators of the website were born in the period from 1976 to 1982. But although the name of the site set certain boundaries for the historical period the community was interested in, this temporal framework was flexible, and the theme was broadly interpreted as the general notion of growing up in the Soviet Union. Furthermore, the site was called an ‘encyclopaedia’ due to its content and structure.⁴ In regard to its subject matter, it is a specialised encyclopaedia covering a variety of topics from a particular cultural and historical perspective. Like traditional encyclopaedias, this online resource is divided into articles or entries. The following is an example of an article in the ‘Encyclopaedia of our childhood’:

The Pioneer Tie

On turning ten years old, every self-respecting *oktiabrenok* removed a red star with the face of a young, curly-haired Lenin from his chest, long since bored with it, and, taking a solemn oath, tied a red kerchief around his or her neck.⁵ The procedure of initiation into the Pioneers required special training: students had to recite the Pioneer oath for a month and learn how to tie the pioneer tie with a special knot.

For new Pioneers, the tie was a matter of pride: it was carefully ironed every day, and especially impressionable schoolgirls never took it off.

⁴ An encyclopaedia, according to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, is a ‘reference work that contains information on all branches of knowledge or that treats a particular branch of knowledge in a comprehensive manner.... The word *encyclopaedia* is derived from the Greek *enkyklios paideia*, ‘general education’, and it at first meant a circle or a complete system of learning – that is, an all-around education.

⁵ Little Octobrists (‘oktiabriata’ in Russian) is a Soviet term which originated in the 1920s and referred to children born in 1917. Later, the term was used as the name of a youth organisation for children between 7 and 9 years of age, before they were inducted into the Pioneer organisation.

Losing the tie was cause for great shame and grief. The state of the tie was strictly monitored by Pioneer leaders: many students were not allowed to enter classes without the red cloth on. A too crumpled tie could also become a serious obstacle on the road to learning. Usually it was fourth and fifth-grade students who had to obey such strict rules. More 'experienced' pioneers could afford to be less fastidious.

At first, the ties were bright red and made from rough cotton fabric. Later, they became orange-red and were made of acetate silk in factories all over the Soviet Union. The tie cost 58 kopecks.

By the age of 14, masses of Pioneers began to forget the value of the Pioneer tie. The ties of seventh and eighth-grade students were more wrinkled and dirty, and some were even covered with pen drawings. By the way, skill in drawing on tie was especially appreciated in Pioneer summer camps. By the end of each sojourn, the neckties of the majority of Pioneers were covered on both sides with best wishes, declarations of love from the boys and assurances of tender friendship from the girls.

Later, Pioneer ties were succeeded by Komsomol badges, which were much more difficult to cover with drawings (http://e-n-d.ru/school_pioneer/283.html).⁶

The interface of the encyclopaedia is rather simple: visitors can find information using both alphabetical and hierarchical indexes. Users can also view images in a visual gallery which is not linked to the articles.⁷ Some images from the gallery are displayed randomly in a sidebar under the title 'Random photo' or 'Artefact'.

Photos and artefacts make up the collection of visual images and material objects contributed by members of the community at the request of the website makers. Thus this is more than a digital encyclopaedia: family photographs, pictures, postcards and a diverse range of artefacts are described in the articles and also represent items collected for a future museum. The collection of material artefacts and unpublished material, in the form of users' written contributions and comments, with the purpose of long-term conservation makes *Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva* more like a museum and an archive. I use the term *archive* here in its

⁶ All examples from the website are translated by the author.

⁷ Some articles are illustrated while others are not. The image gallery functions as separate feature of the website rather than as illustrative material supporting the encyclopaedic entries.

straightforward sense, referring to a collection of material ‘that is stored and can be retrieved through appropriate search operations’ (Kessler and Schäfer 2009, 276). The term is also associated with a ‘general possibility of storing data collections’, but not according to the traditional understanding of institutionalised practices that function ‘accordingly to relatively strictly codified lines of conduct, that have to observe standards defined by professional associations’ (Kessler and Schäfer 2009, 277). In this sense, *Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva* is better conceived as a platform for the collection, aggregation and conservation of tangible and intangible artefacts in addition to an interactive public space for the community members. What makes this and similar online platforms particularly valuable to the users is the fact that, with the help of other users, they receive access to (and can then disseminate) content which is not yet found in or made accessible by traditional cultural institutions. At the same time, it provides links to other information sources online and offline, thus connecting different media. It functions to a certain extent similarly to ‘traditional’ cultural heritage institutions such as archives, libraries and museums in that it collects, preserves and provides public access to its collections for various purposes of education, science, work, culture and leisure. Compared to the collections of ‘traditional’ archives, the authenticity of the online content cannot always be guaranteed: even though users usually describe where objects originate from (a grandmother’s chest, a nearby shop, a neighbour, etc.), there is still a high degree of uncertainty about the origins of the objects.

Archives generally play an essential role in storing data, providing citizens with the ability to monitor how government agencies, organisations and corporations fulfil their duties, and so ensure transparency and democratic development in a country. By providing evidence of governmental and human actions and transactions, and by realising citizens’ rights of access to official information and to knowledge of their history, archives underlie the rights of individuals, organisations and states. In Russia and the Soviet Union, however, access to archives was for a long time denied and is still restricted in some cases. By restricting access to these records, which are important for the freedom of information and democracy, the state encourages dubious conspiracy theories and unreliable historical publications which attempt to explain unclear pages of the country’s history. This forces individuals to create alternative archives in which people share their personal experiences in order to set them against

the official versions of the events and fill in the gaps. It is not certain, however, that such archives can provide reliable evidence and avoid the mythologisation of history. The e-n-d.ru website hardly provides a platform for the exposition of communist crimes – there are other digital platforms that specifically function as repositories for the records of Gulag and other communist crimes⁸ – rather, it is a space for nostalgic memories of the brightest sides of life, those linked to childhood and youth.

7.2 Who Owns Memories?

The Dynamic Relations between ‘Producers’ and Producers

In contemporary society, electronic media offer previously unimaginable capabilities for cultural production. Encyclopaedias have traditionally been in the hands of professionals in various fields. Today, however, many encyclopaedias, such as *Wikipedia*, are databases compiled from user-submitted material (Bruns 2008). Different networks of participants, such as the ‘blogosphere’, have contributed to the production of new, creative content and knowledge which has been subsequently been used by corporations for commercial purposes (Jenkins 2006; Bruns 2007; 2008). The online resource *Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva* is an example of a collaborative web-based community that has created a database of user-submitted material on a specific subject, namely day-to-day life in the Soviet Union. This user-based archive represents a massive ‘crowd-sourcing’ project generated in order to make sense of individual and collective memories and to preserve the cultural heritage of society – a task to which the public authorities in Russia have not yet committed themselves (Howe 2006 2008; Boiler 2007; Surowiecki 2004).

This website, in which visitors are encouraged to write content themselves, illustrates how a specific medium becomes an engine for the construction of collective memory through the process of online discussions and the creation of individual narratives. At the same time, by sharing their memories about the past, users become the creators of media

⁸ For example, the *Virtual Museum of the Gulag*, created and maintained by the civil rights group Memorial, <http://gulagmuseum.org/>; *Sound Archives: European Memories of the Gulag*, <http://museum.gulagmemories.eu/en/>; and *Gulag: Many Days, Many Lives*, by the Roy Rosenzweig Centre at George Mason University, <http://gulaghistory.org/>.

and cultural content, and so should be seen not only as users, but as 'producers': they are not merely passive media consumers, but active media producers. Hence the content of the website can be referred to as 'user-led content' or 'produsage' – that is, a 'collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement' (Bruns 2006, 2). This encyclopaedia can also be seen as part of a more general development in collaborative knowledge management which is emerging 'as a key challenge to the traditional guardian authorities of knowledge' (Bruns 2007). In other words, this community is a part of a larger network of production of knowledge about a certain historical period.

The website has a more elaborate hierarchical structure than most wiki websites. The website's editors, employees of NotaMedia, appoint moderators among the community of users. Moderators are responsible for maintaining order in the discussion forums. Content editors themselves carefully select material and then transform it into encyclopaedic articles (Krupchanski 2013). Producers here have even less control of their content than on true wiki websites: if the uploaded material in an ordinary wiki is edited or removed by other users or page administrators, producers can retrieve the old material and revert the editing process. *Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva* does not allow such freedom over one's own content since only editors can take such decisions. Producers act only as the sources of content, which is then appropriated by the makers of the website and used for various purposes. Even registered producers are not allowed to change or edit text of an article approved by the website editors, although they can make comments on any other user's comments to the articles. The producers of the website have crowdsourced other tasks to the producers, urging them to collect and send in links to relevant content on the web, including links to articles, blogs, and other websites.

The website does not allow producers, whether registered or not, to add, modify or delete the content of the articles or to create new pages. Most articles have been supplemented with links to relevant directories on the web in which visitors can watch extracts or full versions of films and television programmes, read additional information on the topic in journals or newspapers, or listen to related music.⁹ However, in contrast

⁹ Some articles have even links to online stores where users can buy paper or electronic versions of interesting content, download relevant items and navigate to official

to many true wiki websites, hyperlinks or hypertext are not embedded directly in the articles, but placed underneath the text of the entry. The website's pages are updated, not in real time by all users, but by moderators or page administrators.

The editors also decide on the emotional tone of the articles. Users adapt their stories to the given representational frame in hope that they will be accepted as a part of the collaborative project.¹⁰ The website's instructions state that the articles should present necessary background information and include necessary facts on the topics in question, be concise, and take regional differences into consideration.¹¹ The articles are supposed to be written in an informal, emotional and sometimes slightly ironic language. The makers of the website also instruct users on the choice of topics for articles:

- All kinds of computer and electronic games, computers and other technical devices (for 'boys');
- Literature, art, school subjects (for 'girls');
- Music;
- Topics that already exist in the index, but on which there is (what a shame!) no separate article! (<http://www.76-82.ru/forum/viewtopic.php?t=593>)

In their final version, the style of writing suggests that the articles were created by a 'collective author' rather than by an individual. Nevertheless, there is very little by way of stylistic difference from one article to the next.

Adrian Krupchanski has launched a book version of the encyclopaedia project, based on the collected data. Stories written by users, but carefully selected by the editors, form the basis for a series of textbooks about Soviet childhood. One of the reasons behind this project is Krupchanski's interest in book publishing. To him, a book – a medium invented for storing and disseminating information – is still the most reliable way to preserve people's experiences, thoughts and memories for future generations. The digital world provides data access to anyone who uses computers, but it lacks materiality and hardly grants a feeling of ownership. With access to the web, one can retrieve any form of information at

websites. See for instance the article about the children's TV programme *Eralash*, http://e-n-d.ru/smi_tele/451.html.

¹⁰ See the post of September 13, 2006, 16:25, by Dead Shchukar, 'The degree of emotional colour?'

¹¹ See official webpage <http://www.76-82.ru/forum/viewtopic.php?t=593>).

any time from any location, but having a book at on the shelf makes one the owner of a tangible artefact, granting opportunities to smell the ink and the paper, to touch the pages and the cover, and to thumb through the book and hear the sound of the pages turning. Even if the information is available online and easily retrievable, there are many who would justify purchasing a book for those reasons.

However, from a producer's perspective, it is not only fascinating to be involved in the process of creating a book, but it can also be profitable. After all, a book is a commercial product people pay money for, unlike the website, which is an open-access source of information.¹² This commercial aspect of the project brings with it complications for the role of the producers who co-produce the content and makes the issue of authorship and compensation for creative contributions urgent.

The producers of *Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva* have an approach to produsage that can be described as twofold: it includes two different strategies of utilisation of the content, as identified by Bruns (Bruns 2007). First, the producers created a website for the produsage community of LiveJournal – 'harbouring the hive', in Bruns's terms – and then 'harnessed the hive' by using the material provided for financial gain while still cooperating with the community. Cooperation with the community rests on the basic rules of crowdsourcing: offering prizes for the best and the most creative contributions, asking for new product ideas and then releasing products which meet these expectations. Resourceful, committed and, above all, networked people did all the necessary work of aggregating and moderating the data that the producers sought. Rather than money, these people were motivated by a shared vision of archiving, preserving and disseminating knowledge which otherwise would have disappeared.

One might claim that the users share their information voluntarily and benefit from this activity by taking pleasure in communicating with like-

¹² In this sense the *Entsiklopediia* project follows the path already established in another, similar crowdsourcing project, *Moskva, Kotoroi Net* ('The Moscow that is no more'). *Moskva, Kotoroi Net* is an online historical and cultural project about Moscow which collects and archives information about vanishing architectural gems in the centre of the Russian capital, obtaining sought-after content by soliciting contributions from a large group of people, usually members of an online community, and then using that material in a series of books, guidebooks and albums. Starting as a non-profit archival project on the basis of self-organised online communities, *Moskva, Kotoroi Net* has evolved into a successful business model and platform for shared memories which seems to be the model for *Entsiklopediia nashego detstva* as well.

mindful people, in a sense of belonging and in shaping a shared identity. They may also benefit from the ‘therapeutic effects’ of nostalgia, such as coping with traumas or taking an emotional journey to their childhood. But when the data gathered becomes the foundation of a commercial activity, the people who were involved in the process of information aggregation arguably deserve a remuneration for their work. This does not always happen, however, and ‘users are rarely acknowledged or rewarded for their intellectual labour’ (Bruns 2007, 5). In answer to my question about financial reimbursement of the people who shared their memories for the encyclopaedia, Adrian Krupchanski says that the individuals who shared their childhood memories would not be reimbursed because ‘the work they do is not a skilled job’:

If someone wanted to write something that can be considered an output product, then reimbursement would be possible. But general information such as ‘I had a red bow’ and ‘I have a green one’ – it’s not such important information that one should be compensated. Active users will naturally get the book. This is not greed – this is an appropriate reimbursement. (Krupchanski 2013)

On the one hand it is difficult not to agree with Krupchanski: remuneration should be paid for the contribution of quality content, where quality content is understood as unique and full of fascinating details described in a lively, ironic manner, rather than repetitive and similar to other material. Otherwise, every single entry on the website or the community forum would have to be considered for financial compensation. Krupchanski’s position says a great deal about the evaluation of the form of input in knowledge and memory production. Sharing personal memories and nostalgia in the form of short stories, which still have to be turned into encyclopaedic entries by professional editors, is not enough to motivate reimbursement. However, if these memories are written in a certain creative way and professionally edited, then they are evidently considered of a much higher value. In this case, it is the quality of the material and its presentation that matters.

Another reason for such a treatment of individual memories and nostalgia is information overload: the amount of data available for consumption is well beyond the capacity of a single individual to select and classify it. Not everyone has the time, ability and patience to go through

the aggregated information on the web. That is why the work of moderators and editors becomes essential to the process of remembering. At some point, all this information loses its value, as there is too much of it and one can no longer find anything one needs. The format of a book – with more concise, organised information – represents a greater use value, while moderators and editors function as mediators who select information for distribution. At the same time, they are ‘memory gate-keepers’ who select, delete, correct and then sort memories according to specified themes and preferences. Producing narratives of themselves, the users enter into a dialogue not only with each other, but also in a way with the moderators and editors, who have a similar function to that of the anchor of a TV show. The moderators are interlocutors who have privileged access to the contents of memory (Whitehead 2009, 92). In the process of recollecting, the more active agent thus becomes a moderator, while other members of the forums are seen as vessels of memories.

To return to the website, Adrian Krupchanski points out that, by the time the book is out, the website will also welcome its visitors in a new, updated format. In this new project, the company outsources the delivery of all the necessary data to its users, providing technical support for that function. At the same time, the website is completely turned into a product aimed at generating content for and also promoting the book, which has become the central commodity. By prioritising the printed book as a commercial product over computer technology, Krupchanski has in a way gone back in time to the beginning of modern media history, as users remain the contributors of content which is shaped according to the interests of the producers.

7.3 From Online Community to History Book: From Memory to History

The encyclopaedic entries on the website as well as the posts in Facebook and Vkontakte groups integrate different perspectives of those who remember episodes from childhood into one version (see the article about the Pioneer tie). In their comments, the members of the groups challenge this homogenised version by providing their own accounts, correcting and/or adding to the existing version. For example, users try to remember

the exact age at which children were admitted into their Pioneer organisation, and as reach a certain consensus that one had to be nine years old to become a Pioneer:

23.10.2005 Catherine Aniskevich (Katerina):

I think the age of the initiation into Pioneers was 9 years old, not 10.

23.10.2005 Masha (Maria):

Likewise, the age of initiation into the Pioneers was 9. And I was only 8 years old.

Inspired by existing articles, the users engage in discussions in which they not only share their personal experiences, but also try to make sense of these experiences and memories about them. In the process of these discussions, they form a kind of shared experience of Soviet childhood which incorporates a plethora of individual, often very different accounts of the past and attitudes towards various symbols of that past. One example is the pioneer tie. While some users have taken a slightly ironic attitude, others seem to be very serious about this symbol:

15.11.2005 Ira Inozemtseva (ISINO):

When I was at camp, at the end of the season we covered each other's ties with inscriptions ... Once we did that before the last assembly, and I had to walk to the head counsellor. She looked at me with conviction, I remember that I was very excited, what if she suddenly starts telling me off in front of everyone for my tie, but at the same time I felt that I was very cool, like a punk, I swear.

11.11.2008 Dmitrii Chervov (poligraf):

The red Pioneer tie is a symbol of the Red Banner, meaning a particle of the blood of our long-suffering people that was shed in the struggle for genuine freedom. I had the honour of being admitted into the Pioneer organisation in the first round. It happened in January (the others were admitted on April 22, in the second round). Later, I became a Pioneer leader, and naturally I saw to it that my colleagues came to class clean, neat and, most importantly, that they not only had a tie and badge, but that the tie was clean, ironed and properly tied.

At the same time, the users confirmed some of each other's experiences, creating a feeling of a shared past. For example, one user tells about his

experience of being admitted to the pioneer organisation, and another user confirms his experience:

24.11.2005 | Alex (Alexeev):

I was admitted to the Pioneer organisation in the 4th grade, in 1985. We were admitted in the last round, practically just before the summer break [...]. What a reception that was! Everyone else was admitted to the Pioneer organisation at school, but we were – on Red Square near the Lenin mausoleum!

25.04.2007 | Svetlana (svell):

And just like Alex, I was admitted to the Pioneer organisation not in the first call, but in April, at the Lenin Museum on Red Square. It was in 1980.

The users' comments illustrate that the experiences of people born in the late 1970s differ from those of people born in the early 1980s: some of those who were born later missed their chance to become Pioneers due to the transformed political situation:

15.01.2007 Vyacheslav (Some):

And I was not a Pioneer. We were supposed to be admitted all together. But since we did not study well, the reception was postponed until April 22, 1991. And then they said, 'The situation is difficult, wait until fall.' In autumn there were no more Pioneers.

What one can observe is that the online environment functions as a platform in which people remember during the process of communication: users comment on the texts, share their personal memories, discuss and debate, and send in links to relevant material. It is a lively environment in which the image of the past is in the making. This image is constructed both from the accounts of the head of the company, Adrian Krupchanski, and his team, and from those of the general public who, thanks to technological advances, have received access to the means of cultural production.

If the image of the Soviet past is still in the making in the online environment, that image becomes more static in the book project: the memories are more homogenised and tailored to a certain world view. In the users' comments on the website, due to the format and technical

capabilities, ‘memory is life’ and ‘remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic remembering and forgetting’ (Nora 1989, 8). The website deals with an ‘actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present’, while the book suggests a fixed ‘representation of the past’ (Nora 1989, 8). The printed book is a fixed, non-changing medium in which the content cannot be altered or corrected after publication. One may argue that the articles on the website, written by invisible authors and then edited by no less invisible editors, can also be seen as ‘fixed’ representations of the past, while the users’ comments often function as critical challenges to those representations. Nevertheless, although the website articles are edited by professionals and therefore mediate a certain attitude to the Soviet past, the website format still allows differentiation and contestation of various opinions. By encapsulating these collective memories of the community in the medium of a history textbook, the director of the website takes on the authority of writing history – he assumes that a certain image of the past is the correct one and should be passed on to the younger generations.

7.4. Representations of the Soviet Past and Nostalgia Online

The website *Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva* sets childhood at the centre of the modern post-Soviet community as a unifying factor. That is clear first of all in the title of the site: it is an ‘encyclopaedia of our childhood’ in which childhood is the main subject of discussion. The pronoun ‘our’ implies that *we all* share a similar experience of growing up. Second, the people engaged in discussions in the forum were born and grew up in the Soviet Union and therefore potentially share such similar experiences. However, neither experiences nor memories of childhood are as homogeneous as those presented in the encyclopaedia’s articles. This is clearly visible from the users’ comments about school uniforms:

15.12.2005 Elena (Leyna):

I remember how difficult it was every Sunday to wash my cuffs and collar, iron them and then sew them onto the school uniform.

03.01.2006 Olesia Zakharova (Lisena):

I don’t recall any specific negative emotions, on the contrary. I felt I was an independent person who was responsible for my own looks. I loved ironing my [Pioneer] tie.

02.04.2006 | Olga (ptitcina):

Starting in the first grade (1984) we had swimsuits for gymnastics and for some reason they had to be blue. I had a black one. Yes, actually we all had a 'different blue' [...]. Swimsuits were insanely rare and losing one was a calamity, because without uniforms we were not allowed to attend the class. But in the fifth or seventh grade (we didn't have sixth grade) it became more relaxed and we were allowed to wear pants and shirts.

02.04.2006 | Olga (ptitcina):

Addendum: Why they chose swimsuits for sports is still a mystery. Imagine how ridiculous they looked!

Nevertheless, childhood is a common denominator for the whole community of adults. But it is not only similar experiences that bring people closer together; it is also the fact that childhood as a rite of passage is past and is forever unreachable. The impossibility of going back to not only mythologises the whole past experience, but also romanticises the process of remembering it.

Sigmund Freud wrote in his essay 'Screen Memories' (1899) that childhood memories to some extent reproduce the original event, but at the same time disguise and displace it. He pointed out that it is doubtful whether people have any memories *from* childhood, rather than memories *related* to childhood. Childhood memories seem to show us our past as it was, but in reality they only reveal it as it appears at the time of remembering. Instead of speaking of the emergence of memories, one should therefore speak about the formation of memories at a certain time. In his later *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), Freud comes back to this point, stating that a memory of childhood is not the genuine memory, but a later version of it, which is subject to the different concerns of the present. Freud 'articulates a version of memory in which the past no longer resides in the original impressions, but in the process of remembering itself [...]. The delayed action of remembering, in other words, allows the past to develop, to evolve along with changing circumstances over time' (Whitehead 2009, 91). The experiences of childhood and therefore the memories about life in the USSR are under construction on the website and in social networks linked to the website.

Through the reconstruction of these childhood experiences, the narrative about the Soviet past becomes associated with innocence and

sincerity remembered in a sentimental and very emotional manner, and objects play the role of accumulators of this naiveté and sincerity, and are elevated to the status of fetishes in a dream-like past:

They dreamed of an imported toy train set, a talking doll, felt-tip pens smelling of fruit, and an amazing chewing gum called 'bubble gum'. They called together their friends and consumed in one day a mountain of meat balls their parents had cooked to last a week; they secretly dressed up in the things bought 'to grow into'; they painted paper dolls and copied styles of clothing from the fashion magazines borrowed from their mothers; they diluted cologne pens to use them longer and ate toothpaste after watching *Nu Pogodi!* and *Cheburashka* because it smelled delicious. They still know perfectly that Soviet lemonade tasted better than anything else, and prefer ice cream in a cup-shaped cone ... (<http://e-n-d.ru/project/>).

It is no accident that one of the central themes of Soviet nostalgia is mourning one's 'lost childhood innocence' (Nadkarni, Shevchenko 2004, 496) and sincerity, mediated through discourses of childhood. The Soviet Union, personified by its leaders, had a paternalistic relationship with its citizens: the 'father of the nation' took care of its 'children' by deciding all questions for its citizens, up to and including matters of private life (Dobrenko and Gunther 2000). After 1991 – the moment of 'initiation' after the fall of the empire – the 'nation' suddenly left childhood and unexpectedly entered a period of adulthood. In the process of growing up, in both real and symbolic terms, innocence became an important concept.

This exclusion manifests itself in two different ways. First of all, in the presentation of a dream world, which is put against the real world, mainly characterised by cynicism. In the dream world innocence is celebrated by the children as well as the adults Secondly, in the widely spread strategy of othering children and adults, in which the adult world takes the form of a Dystopia and the children's world of a Utopia. (Moran 2002,)

By association, the world of Utopia becomes the Soviet past: the people who are involved in the process of remembering intimately link it with childhood and adolescence. Meanwhile, the period of Dystopia is associated with end of innocence and sudden adulthood, which coincides with the cynicism of unfettered capitalism. Then childhood is conceived as a state of ignorance of the sins of the world. The main sin of the world is identified with consumption and the loss of true values due to the

constant struggle for consumption. The aversion for contemporary consumer culture contains a strong longing for a better society in the form of a better childhood. The orientation towards this childhood is an orientation towards the past. To be ignorant of the social rules of modern capitalism, not yet spoiled by its sins, means to be innocent. Childhood is presented not in terms of helplessness or limitation but in an image of purity and integrity, which creates an additional meaning of adulthood.

This eternal hunt for lost childhood paves the way for nostalgia because the gap between childhood and adulthood will never completely disappear. Childhood is therefore 'envisioned as a form of nostalgia, a longing for times past, not as a futurity' (Jenks 1996, 107).

Childhood – a temporary state – becomes an emblem for our anxieties about the passing of time, the destruction of historical formations, or conversely, a vehicle for our hopes for the future. The innocent child is caught somewhere over the rainbow – between nostalgia and utopian optimism, between the past and the future. (Jenkins 1998, 5)

In this respect nostalgia secures a passage from the state of lost innocence to the state of regained innocence. Nostalgia is presented as a tool to search for what has been lost or is believed lost. With the arrival of capitalism, what was lost was, in Krupchanski's opinion, the old, cherished values. While 'in our parents' time', as Krupchanski labels it, friendship was on top of the value system, the hallmark of capitalism is consumerism:

Now it is much more appealing to consume. You always need everything new, and, in my opinion, it destroys people. Because there are some eternal values, and there are some values that are eternal, but *not quite right*. Now we are under the pressure of a much stronger propaganda machine than there was in Soviet times. Buy! Buy! Buy! Money rules the world. There is an obvious degradation, especially if you look at morality. In fact, morality is not a relative concept – it is an absolute concept. If you look at the level of morality at schools, you will see worrisome things. God forbid you should plunge into what is happening in schools now! There is an apparent decline in morality. (Krupchanski 2013)

Krupchanski's approach is in line with a sentiment shared by many Russians who 'frequently associate the Soviet epoch with a particular

“spirituality” (*dukhovnost*) specific to Soviet society and Soviet people, and absent in contemporary Russia, associated with “vulgarity”, “spiritual impoverishment”, and “consumerism” (Morenkova 2012, 47). The sincerity and feeling of belonging to a community, which is felt to have been lost in the capitalist world, can apparently be recovered by reaching out to the world of yesterday:

05.09.2007 Maxim Liulchenko (maxel_ua):

‘Chestnoe Pionerskoe’ [i.e. the phrase ‘Pioneer’s word of honour’] is sacred. And the [Pioneer] tie was sacred. It is a pity that we were so quick to lose all the moral and other values. Threw away all that we had, but have not come up with anything new. So now we are starting to reap the fruits of it.

11.04.2008 Irina Timofeeva (tima):

I loved being in the Pioneer organisation. At least we always had fun; sometimes we collected waste paper and scrap. Maybe it was because I was on the board of the Pioneer organisation. The initiation was very memorable. We sailed to the big warship, stood side by side in front of sailors who clumsily knotted the ties and even joked about it. It was a memorable for a long time. This is what I think our children lack. There has to be an ideal. Now they neither believe nor honour anything. We need an ideal.

The users of the community mourn the loss of a unifying national idea, ‘the formulation of the bonds that members of a population should share’ (Sperling 2003, 234), which was lost with the advent of globalisation and capitalism, associated with the West, which once was an utopian dream and now became the source of disappointment (Nadkarni and Shevchenko 2004, 495). The innocent Soviet past and the ‘correct values’ discussed among the community are set against the perceived new system of values – consumerism, cynicism, vulgarity etc. – which is believed to be imposed by Western civilisation and ‘alien’ to the Russian value system. Such attitudes are not surprising as people believe that ‘modern conditions, notably capitalism and bureaucracy, have corroded individuality and induced powerful feelings of estrangement and homelessness’ (Smith 1986, 175). At the same time it signals the disenchantment of once idealised ‘Other’.

The purpose of the website and the book project is ‘not to recall a pioneer tie, but certain values’ which could facilitate a strong group

identity (Krupchanski 2013). Such appeals to childhood and value systems of the past are not unique to the Russian experience: myths of childhood innocence and a better past have often been mobilised in times of decline (Moran 2002, 157; Hewison 1987). Nostalgia for periods of innocence has previously been employed in order to establish particular national narratives in response to the processes of globalisation and shrinking powers of the nation-states (Smith 1986). Nostalgia has also been used to reinscribe traditional values of patriotism, as both nostalgia and patriotism have a very strong emotional element (Hewison 1987).

In order to reestablish a strong, common identity and to recover the national idea, Russia has to return to the 'morally correct' values, which include two essential building blocks for the nation: the unity of a community, described by Krupchanski as friendship, and patriotism, commonly understood as love and support for one's country and conceived by scholars as 'the popularisation of a national idea, intended to bring the state's population together in a common bond of support for the current regime' (Sperling 2003, 234).

Adrian Krupchanski carefully distinguishes between patriotism of the past and the kind of patriotism he wants to see in the citizens of contemporary Russia, which is 'not fake (*dutyi*), not paid, but sincere' patriotism (Krupchanski 2013). Although he admits that the patriotic feelings nurtured in the Soviet Union were 'not formed in the right way', he nevertheless believes that should not stop people from being proud that Gagarin was the first person in space. Moreover, in his opinion, the Soviet state, compared with modern Russia, had much to be proud of, while all attempts to forge a uniting national idea since 1991 have failed.

The role models Krupchanski proposes illustrate well the type of patriotism he is looking for: 'If we look back into our Soviet childhood, who were our heroes? The policeman! What qualities did he possess? He defended truth! He was honest! There were *physicists*. It is good to be clever, but it is also romantic' (Krupchanski 2013). Presumably, Krupchanski's 'morally correct' values are qualities of these characters: the policeman's honesty and defence of 'truth' and the scientist's intelligence, selflessness and romanticism. The policeman in the Soviet period functioned as a figure of state power, but also symbolised a combination of Soviet ideology with the Russian romantic mood. He was a 'heroic figure of state authority'; the real cliché of Soviet realism. It is not an ironic figure, but a mythic one, functioning as a mediator of truth. The

policeman has a divine mission: to bring and safeguard the truth. Presented in a naïve, childlike manner, the figure of the policeman almost becomes safe, unthreatening. He expresses a desire for both peace and order which is apparently lacking today, and for a powerful authority that can take care of the ‘children’ of the state and protect them from the ‘enemy’. It is a longing for a constructive, strong power which is expressed through the metaphor of the policeman. Meanwhile, the humble character of the scientist symbolises a constant quest for knowledge: he is loyal to his ideals and works not for money, but for ideas.

In short, the style of Krupchanski’s project was nostalgic in feeling and archaeological by subject, belonging to the utopian tradition. At the same time, in appealing to the naïve consciousness of children, Krupchanski addressed the most stable surface layers of reality (films, toys), since all other levels are either metaphysical, unknown and amenable to ideological substitution, or too complex for deconstruction, and hence not suited to the ideological purpose of recreating the illusion of security and community. While admitting the complexity of Soviet reality, he nevertheless chooses nostalgic interpretations of its elements, which carry traces of ‘correct’ patriotism and promote the ‘right’ values and feelings.

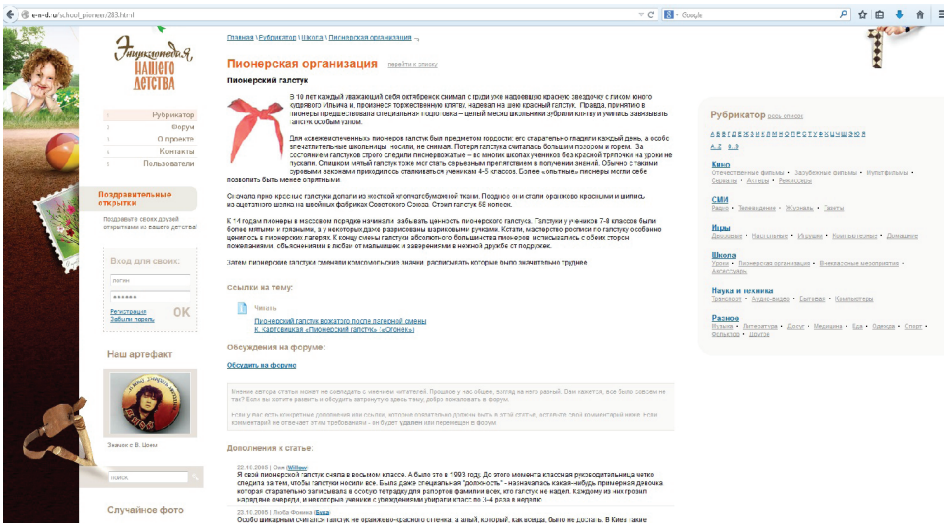
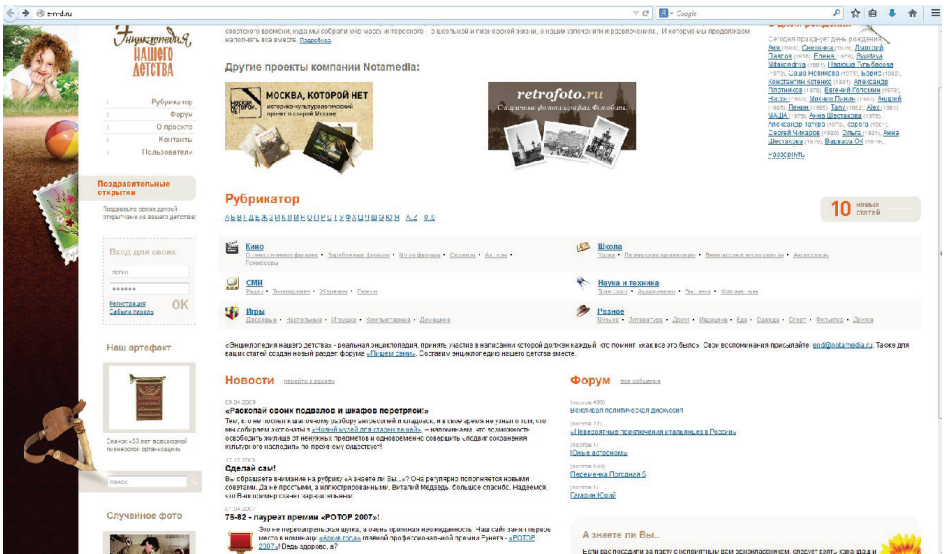
Krupchanski’s project can be understood as embodying a ‘new sincerity’ – a concept identified by the poet Dmitrii Prigov and the critic Mikhail Epstein as a response to the dominant sense of absurdity in late Soviet and post-Soviet culture (Yurchak 2008, 258) – in which one uses obsolete, dead languages with a renewed pathos of love, sentimentality and enthusiasm (Epstein and Genis 1999, 146). The concept of the new sincerity entails avoiding cynicism, but not necessarily irony. It also sums up the approach Adrian Krupchanski is taking. I described in the previous chapter how Antonina Shapovalova uses a similar approach, ‘a particular brand of irony, which is sympathetic and warm, and allows its authors to remain committed to the ideals that they discuss, while also being somewhat ironic about this commitment’ (Yurchak 2008, 259). The new sincerity is dominated by nostalgic feelings, and these nostalgic sentiments are seen as positive and constructive as they bring out the best – the most sincere – in people. They bring forth not only warmth and honesty, but also the clichés of the past, such as Gagarin and the honest policeman. These are idealised images which were used for propaganda purposes. It is a memory of a postcard with a smiling Gagarin and of a policeman as a character in a children’s book or an animated film.

7.5. Concluding Remarks

Entsiklopediia nashego detstva has gathered an online community of people scattered across the former Soviet republics who felt the need to construct a strong collective identity. It united geographically and politically disconnected people on the basis of common memories about childhood. Invoked as a common denominator, childhood signified a period of innocence and sincerity which people were searching to reconstruct in their modern, adult lives. The discourse of childhood and the past becomes a discussion about modern values, patriotism and capitalism as well as a platform for discussing national identity, which is formulated in opposition to the West.

Starting as a non-profit archival project on the basis of a self-organised online community, the online repository *Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva* has developed into a successful business model. Community members have been encouraged to share their memories, ideas, stories and visual material for the creation of intangible (online) and tangible (printed) archives. Following the basic rules of crowdsourcing – praising the best and most creative contributions, asking for new product ideas and then releasing products that meet those expectations – the company has managed to aggregate oral culture and tangible artefacts into one big pot of cultural heritage. Resourceful and committed people did all the necessary work of aggregating and moderating the data that the producers looked for. These people were motivated not by money, but more by a shared idea of archiving, preserving and disseminating knowledge that would otherwise disappear, as official archives, libraries, museums and other institutions at that time were not interested in and had no resources to preserve such material. The shared interest in the past and desire to communicate and build collective identities led to the self-organisation of a large community which made use of Internet services as a tools for communicative and knowledge-generating practices. As a result, the use and application of mass intelligence led to the production of mass creative works – an online encyclopaedia with the community as one of its authors, the other being the editors who selected and presented the collected data. At the same time, the editors acted as memory gatekeepers who ultimately get all the financial rewards, but also decide which content will go into the book publication. This transfer from one medium to another (from an open online resource to a book) adds an interesting

dimension to the relations between history and memory in which history is signified by the book and memory by the community website. On the website we can actually observe the process of remembering and the construction of collective memory, which lay the foundation for the writing of history.



Top: Screenshot of the official webpage of the Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva

Bottom: The screenshot of the official webpage of the Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva, the article is about a pioneer tie

8. Nostalgia and Structure of Feeling in Russia, 1991–2012

The main objective of this project was to investigate the mediation of the Soviet past as one of the elements of a structure of feeling in the period between 1991 and 2012 by studying different mediating arenas. The investigation was guided by three research questions: (1) How is the Soviet past represented in different mediating arenas of post-Soviet nostalgia? (2) How have the mediated representations of the Soviet past changed during the past twenty years? And (3) how is nostalgia defined and which types of nostalgia can be identified in connection with the different actors and mediating arenas during the period under study? These questions were posed on the assumption that cultural changes can be studied by applying Raymond Williams' theory of structure of feeling. In answering these questions I will summarise the main findings of the study.

8.1 Arenas of Mediation and Representations of the Soviet Past

In the research process, I have found several general trends in representations of the Soviet past that can be traced across different platforms as well as some specific representational strategies which are particular to a specific medium or genre. The general trends visible in all arenas of mediation point to the existence of an underlying logic which structures emotional components in culture, or, in other words, to the existence of a 'structure of feeling', to use the term coined by Raymond Williams, which I explained in Chapter 2.

Representations of the Soviet era in Russian culture during the period under scrutiny defied a simple, one-dimensional evaluation of the past and linear chronological arrangements. The Soviet period was often conceived as a coexistence rather than a succession of epochs. For example, the space of the Petrovich restaurant was filled with objects that were arranged, not chronologically, but chaotically. Different decades existed simultaneously in this spatial setting according to a kind of associative logic which worked

not through years in the calendar, but through objects: past time was visualised through material objects that connected viewers with emotions linked to a certain period of time. A similar strategy was adopted in the online *Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva*, where users shared their memories about certain aspects of the Soviet life by discussing different items such as the Pioneer tie or school uniforms. In television programmes, the complexity of the historical period was represented through the mixed narration of the banal and the sublime, the political and the everyday: toys, consumer products, official statements and events of great political importance received equal attention, setting up an interplay of individual and communal spheres of life, a mixture of private and public identities. The main message mediated through these various representations was that there was good and bad in the Soviet Union and that life was possible and even enjoyable against all odds. One of the reasons for such a representation of the historical period lies in the way memory works – namely through association (van Dijck 2007). Nostalgia, usually understood as sentimental longing for the irreversibly gone periods of life, adds an affective component, which for nostalgia is more important than the exact reconstruction of the historical period. This emotional reaction, which is achieved in the process of contact with various stimuli, stipulates how the historical period would be presented. Hence, the combination of elements for the representation is chosen in correlation to the emotions they trigger in the viewer, and often memory combines them in strange and unpredictable ways.

Nevertheless, the way in which the past was represented also depended on the specifics of media platforms and media genres. For example, the television documentary programmes produced in the end of the 2000s employed a similar associative logic as the restaurant organising the historical period in question according to certain aspects of Soviet life which they, however, presented in more or less chronological order. The television formats of documentary and talk show used in the programmes *Namedni* and *Staraia Kvartira* structured time on the basic syntactical level: the represented topics followed a linear time order, where some topics had to precede others because they related to earlier historical events. The narrative of the year had to unfold itself between the beginning of the year and its end. Nevertheless, the episodes in the programs were not always structured according to their actual unfolding

in 'real time'. The handpicked events of the year were represented according to the logic of narration in television, in which topics smoothly follow one another. The unfolding of the narrative of past events was constructed so that the logical and visual connections between them made the events were comprehensible to the viewer. It became clear that the amount of time allocated was not defined only by the political importance of the events, but also by the visual qualities of the available material and the compatibility of media genres.

Another important aspect of this structure of feeling that can be traced in the representations of the Soviet past studied here is the intention to restore the feeling of a community and to facilitate the communication of memories and experiences between different generations. This is especially important because individuals and groups form their identities through the process of remembering. For identity to crystallise, the process of longing, the localisation of home and a coming to terms with one's origins are central activities.

The representational strategies are different depending on the characteristics of the mediating arenas. In the restaurant Petrovich, in plays and in the TV programmes *Staraiia Kvartira*, *Namedni* and *Starie Pesni o Glavnom*, spatial configurations allow continuous space travel. The compressed space of the TV studios and the restaurant interior unites a territorially, spatially distorted and dispersed country which no longer exists within its former borders. Objects that travelled from various geographical destinations to be collected in one space symbolically represent a unification of the whole country. People who found themselves in such a place at a given moment (whether physically in the Petrovich restaurant or symbolically among the audience of a TV programme or in the theatre) were able to reconnect with the community of a shared past. In fashion, the process of creating a community occurred on a symbolic level: when used in designer garments, visual elements that refer to the past function as cultural codes that the people of the same culture shared. And the whole purpose of the *Entsiklopediia Nashego Detstva* was to reconnect people who had lived in the same country – the USSR – by establishing a virtual space of online forums where people from different geographical locations could communicate and share their memories.

Going into more detail, we may point out that, in resembling old communal apartments or Soviet diners, restaurants invited visitors back to the 'common places' (Boym 1994) of the Soviet Union by offering

narrative topoi that were important for understanding both the Soviet past and present-day reality. Material objects were brought together to form a space for remembering, making the space look familiar – making it look like home – and propitious to communication. The mediated spaces in Mark Rozovski's plays bear the marks of an old Moscow courtyard and a communal apartment. In both cases, the space becomes an arena for narration, while material referents signify the everyday practices of a certain period. Theatre adds a more interactive and more dramatised dimension to the environment. Both plays, *Pesni nashego dvora* and *Pesni nashei kommunalki*, are symbolical spaces one can come back to in the absence of the real physical space. But while restaurant visitors actively inhabit and use the space of the restaurant, the theatre audience only observe how this space is or could be inhabited. They participate in the event by watching the performance and observing how the past is performed. They may also join in the activities on the stage by sharing a glass of vodka or singing a song.

Something similar happens in the television show *Staraia Kvartira*, where anchors and guests of the programme reenact different episodes of everyday life in the Soviet Union on a set decorated as a communal apartment. However, this time the communal apartment becomes an integral part of another 'common place': a Soviet *dom kultury*. Hence TV viewers not only watch the performance representing Soviet life, but they also watch the audience in the studio watching that performance. The audience in the studio not only experience the past performed on the stage, but also encounter the past by being a part of the audience in a *dom kultury* and being watched by the TV viewers. In this way the medium of television allows a far more complex experience of the past: the TV viewers, while watching the programme sitting on the sofa at home, not only observe the events happening on stage, but they also observe how and what they could have experienced by being in the audience. The television medium also allows a remediation and a constant flow of content that was previously broadcast on Soviet Central Television and is not available in any other format such as DVD. The availability of cable television with its niche channels and of Internet technologies creates situations of hypermediacy and makes it possible to virtually experience the 1970s or the 1980s while living in the 2000s. In contrast to the theatre or the restaurant Petrovich, television brings the past into the homes of many more people. With the advance of the Internet, the TV channel

Nostal'giia has made some of its programmes available on the web, thereby including even more people in former Soviet republics and international diasporas in the process of remembering. In so doing, the producers consciously highlighted the mediated condition of the past, thus compelling a reflexive experience of the media of the past and the historical period in general.

8.2 Change in the Structure of Feeling

In the early 1990s, after the collapse of communism, Russian society was going through turbulent changes which were accompanied by a fight for the legacy of the communist past. In the end, these debates were silenced, and no real trial of the party nomenclature and secret police officers ever took place (Smith 2002). Instead, politicians called for forgiveness of the crimes of the past in order for the country to move forward, and the past traumas were never worked through. Over the years, the excitement and hopes connected with Yeltsin's reforms were replaced by disappointment, melancholia and a desire for stability and security. Nostalgic voices became more prominent in the Yeltsin era, and support for the Communist Party grew. In 1995, the communists won the parliamentary election and there was a strong fear that in 1996 the leader of the Communist Party, Gennadii Ziuganov, would win the presidential election. In fact Boris Yeltsin won that election, but the Soviet material and visual culture which had been forced into oblivion after 1991 by the all-pervasive Western media and popular culture slowly started to creep back. It began as grass roots initiatives characterised by attempts to understand and evaluate the historical era in question and to preserve memories about it. Appearing first in the artistic and creative circles, which, according to Raymond Williams, are the most sensitive to historical changes, the post-Soviet structure of feeling has slowly become a totalising phenomenon. It also changed dramatically in parallel with the generational change and the change of political climate. Many of these changes coincided with the time when Vladimir Putin came to power.

Although it is difficult to draw a line between these cultural transformations because of their gradual appearance, it is still possible to point out some structural differences between the decades under study. The reflective and critical attitude to the Soviet past which was characteristic of the 'last Soviet generation' first gave way to a commercial exploitation

of the past by 'the last children of the Soviet Union', and then political forces took on board the glorious moments of the Soviet period, involving people who were born after the Soviet Union had collapsed. This transformation was accompanied by an alteration of the nostalgic longing for the Soviet period from – in Svetlana Boym's terms – reflective to restorative nostalgia. Reflective nostalgia was a romantic longing for and an attempt to understand the time that could never be brought back (usually childhood or youth), and restorative nostalgia consisted of conscious attempts to restore the empire through greater control of the political order and an explicit project of raising 'patriotic' and loyal citizens. For example, in the 1990s, Petrovich was the only 'nostalgic' restaurant with restricted access to the public. By the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, more bars and restaurants had opened that were decorated in a similar style as Petrovich, exploiting the commercial potential of nostalgia. Compared with Petrovich which was one of the first attempts to 'excavate' and preserve Soviet material culture, and thus a kind of unofficial museum of that culture, the later restaurants and clubs offered more sterilised and uniform Soviet kitsch. In the 2000s, the initiative of collecting, which had been started by Andrei Bil'zho, smoothly shifted into the hands of private collectors who opened the first private museums of the USSR. Remarkably, in 2012 some political actors with federal support launched an initiative to create a major national museum of the USSR which is supposed to present an 'unbiased picture of the Soviet Union'.

During the 2000s, Soviet aesthetics penetrated many media in which reflection on the past became secondary while the visual codes were primary. One of these media was fashion, in which the use of Soviet symbols as a protest against the system gave way to the use of those symbols to restore the legitimacy of the previous and support the present political system. Fashion brands skilfully proposed a retrospect on the period, signified through the visual codes of the Soviet time fused with new materials. In contrast to the ironic reuse of the military uniforms by the 'hooligans of the 1980s', who had exploited irony as, in Linda Hutcheon's expression, a 'rhetorical and structural strategy of resistance and opposition', the fashion brands of the 2000s did not recycle old garments, but instead created new products skilfully playing on the Soviet symbols in prints and motifs, so that irony became a strategy to increase brand recognition (Hutcheon 1994, 12). The Soviet past became an

emotional currency which went hand in hand with the political game of patriotism. In commercialising Soviet symbols, the fashion brands carefully purged them of complex meanings, so that the emptied symbols could be filled with new ideological and political meanings. The designer brand Antonina Shapovalova symbolises this important shift in the popular relation to the past and to protest exercised through irony. In contrast to earlier examples, Shapovalova's irony, instead of subverting dominant discourses, reified and reproduced them. Patriotism and nationalism based on an emotional relationship with the subject merged with an emotional attitude towards the Soviet past. At the same time, TV channels showed a new type of documentary with a more explicit patriotic and political subtext. Nevertheless, critical readings of the past also existed, although they were moved to the margins of the national cultural fabric. The productions of the cable channel *Nostal'giia* are a good example. The channel itself illustrates the combination of different types of content, mixing reruns with documentaries. While reruns arouse an emotional response in the viewers, documentaries and talk shows pose many questions for contemplation.

The example of irony also manifests a potential shift in paradigms. In the 1980s, the 1990s and the early 2000s, irony was used with the purpose of conveying multiple alternative meanings to audiences. With such a variety of meanings, which might be mutually inconsistent or contradictory, the derivation of meaning on the part of the audience becomes complex and demands of the audience an active engagement in the process. Instead, later audiences dismiss ironic artefacts as incoherent, because postmodern irony tends to be confusing, complex and inconsistent. There is a desire for meanings to be stable and easy to understand against the chaos of polyphony in post-Soviet society. This rejection of ironic attitudes may be connected to the general rejection of the postmodern paradigm and the revival of conservative modes of thinking.

8.3 Definitions and Strands of Nostalgia

Previous research presented in the Introduction and in Chapter 2 has revealed that there are different approaches to and classifications of nostalgia. My empirical investigation, with its strong focus on the producers' perspective, adds some new insights to this existing research.

The informants defined nostalgia variously and, depending on their definition, they either admitted that they experienced nostalgia themselves or attributed nostalgia to someone else. For example, they singled out what Svetlana Boym has called 'restorative nostalgia', which in this case can be best described as the desire to restore the previous authoritarian political regime. Such a nostalgia was often attributed to Russia's ruling elites and those media producers who, the informants felt, belonged to different political camps. Closely related to this political restorative nostalgia was a 'commercial' nostalgia. The commercial exploitation of Soviet symbols was an important issue to those accusing others of being nostalgic. Commercialisation was automatically seen as an action which removed any critical attitude or valuable meaning from the symbolic object and which could lead to the exploitation of the symbol by politicians. None of the informants whose definitions of nostalgia were politically restorative or commercial said that their own actions could be characterised as manifestations of nostalgia for the Soviet period and could stimulate nostalgic experiences in audiences. On the contrary, they believed that they encouraged a critical and reflective approach to the past aimed at making sure that the monsters from the past would never be resurrected. Such an approach, they nevertheless admitted, could also be called nostalgic, but only in reference to a totally different kind of nostalgia – 'reflective' nostalgia, which helps us better to understand the past, the present and the future through constant efforts to revisit the past. This type of nostalgia is supposed to preserve the memory of the past for younger generations, and in doing so encourages cultural production. Defining nostalgia in this way, the producers also constructed their professional identity and political affiliation in relation to other people and other cultural forms.

They also claimed that the content they produced was a reflection of the 'spirit of the times', while they themselves were merely the translators of this *Zeitgeist* into a consumable form. If the content they produced could be defined as nostalgic, that meant that nostalgia was 'in the air'. That was due to several factors: first, the producers believed that nostalgia was a 'normal' response of human beings to certain changes, especially generational succession. Hence experiencing nostalgia for one's youth and childhood was a general experience from which neither audiences nor producers were exempt. Second, they saw nostalgia as a general response to political and socio-economic transformations that had

occurred in Russian society during the past decades, and this response had to be addressed. Hence the content producers conceived their actions as a response to the demands of the audiences, shunning responsibility for shaping public opinion. In doing so they divided audiences into two categories: the masses, i.e. unspecified groups of people who had no opinion and were easily manipulated, and their own target group, a smaller group of people for whom a specific media content was produced. The producers seemed to see the first type of audience as the one that agrees completely with the meanings offered by media which ‘inject’ people with information that they believe in – in Stuart Hall’s vocabulary, taking a ‘dominant/hegemonic position’ (Hall 1980; see also Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). Furthermore, the producers see themselves in the role of educators of these audiences so that they will not fall prey to ‘dangerous political messages’. Another type of audience can understand the meanings disseminated by the media, but either disagrees with their postulates (taking an ‘oppositional position’) or opposes the preferred reading but has to compromise and somehow adapt it nonetheless (taking a ‘negotiated position’). This type of audience has specific needs and actively turns to the media to consume media content in order to satisfy those needs. The producers therefore have to deliver what the audiences want in order to make money. In this model, even if the content is not intended to raise nostalgic emotions, audiences prone to nostalgia will interpret it as nostalgic. Such a perspective on the producers’ and audiences’ roles in the articulations of nostalgia can be related both to uses-and-gratifications theory and to Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model, in which the reader’s translation of the message is highly important (McQuail 2010; Hall 1980).

This discussion of the role of audiences in the process of interpretation reveals the underlying attempts to medicalise nostalgia – that is, to conceive it as an incurable medical condition of the spirit. My research has shown, however, that there must be a focus on the process of mediation. In talking about nostalgia, people often protested about the distance of *the media content* from its *historical referent*: in other words, people were not satisfied with the representation of a certain time period in media. Often, this aggression tended to be directed against the medium itself, predominantly in the case of television. It seems that the blame for the misinterpretation of history – and of life – is placed both on nostalgia and on the medium. At the same time, people were longing for the time

represented in the media of the past: this explains popularity of reruns. Searching for authenticity and blaming representations of the past for being historically inaccurate, audiences were attracted by the contemporary media representations of the past. Authenticity was no longer the primary concern in regard to such representations; they were representations that satisfied the image in which people wished the past to be seen. It seems too that the media themselves were nostalgic for the media of the past, and thus searching for familiar images. However, this longing for the lost time as symbolised in the familiar imagery of the media was doomed to be disappointing. Watching the old media often turned out to be boring, as their pace was slow and not exciting enough for those who were accustomed to a totally new type of media which was more advanced, fast and multidimensional. Watching reruns of the old programmes could kill the nostalgic longing. What might keep the fire of longing burning, on the other hand, were new films and TV series which would be far less authentic and apply more advanced technical tricks to make the imaginary world more colourful and more digestible for sophisticated audiences. The media are indeed media of longing: without some connection to history, the absence of an authentic signifier would make any longing obsolete. At the same time, the connection to the referent need not be too strong. A connection to the original referent may be placed in a contemporary context which would mythologise and romanticise it even more. At the same time, the current medium must satisfy contemporary needs – technically, aesthetically and symbolically.

8.4 Critical Reflections

The primary goal of this study was to examine the representations of the Soviet past and the changes that occurred in those representations during the period from 1991 to 2012. One of the greatest challenges was to find an analytical mode that would allow the study of such change without adding too much complexity and preconditioned structure. The choice of Raymond Williams' concept of a 'structure of feeling' determined the open method and the selection of the case studies. The result was a diverse sample of material which was challenging to compare both within each mediating arena and between different arenas. The challenge was to find representative examples in which the elements of structure of feeling and the relations between the examples were visible, and then to collect and

analyse a significant amount of empirical material without drowning in details.

Different paths could have been taken in studying this change, and the conceivable alternatives simultaneously hint at possible directions for future research in this field. Instead of concentrating on visual culture, for example, I could have focused on literature and its adaptations in film and theatre. Such an attempt to see how the representations of the past have been transformed with the change of the medium would have taken a specific literary text as a starting point. However, that course would have brought with it a perspective of literature studies, dealing with translations and adaptations, while I have mainly focused on more general cultural trends.

Furthermore, one might undertake a more detailed discourse analysis by including discussions in press and on television. I did so here to a certain extent, but for the purpose of providing background and contextualising information.

In regard to theoretical approaches to the uses of the past, it may be possible to focus on the 'uses of heritage' (Smith 2006) in combination with the theory of affective economy, as developed in Sara Ahmed's *Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) for example. Nostalgia can then be further conceived as a cultural practice and an important element of the affective economy. This approach could also be combined with a more focused view of the informal networks that contribute to such an economy. However, such an approach would necessitate more participating observation, which was not possible at the time this project was launched.

I write these lines in August 2014, when Crimea has been annexed by the Russian Federation, western Ukraine is in a state of devastating armed conflict with many civilians dead, and we are witnessing a memory war on Russian television over Ukraine. The political situation underscores the urgency of studying the processes of history and memory use, the manipulations of affective nostalgia with the aim of installing nationalist views, and the use of nostalgia in mediated wars.

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In the early 1990s, after the collapse of communism in Russia, Soviet material and visual culture had been forced into obscurity by the all-conquering Western media and pop culture. The excitement and hopes connected with President Yeltsin's reforms gave way to disappointment, melancholia and a desire for stability and security. Nostalgic voices became more prominent, and the old Soviet sign system slowly started to seep back into the fabric of Russian culture. Around this time, Soviet-nostalgia-themed restaurants opened their doors. Television channels in the same vein began showing reruns of old Soviet films, children's cartoons and broadcasting documentaries and talk shows where the presenters and guests discussed various aspects of life in the USSR. In the 2000s, nostalgia for the Soviet past was exploited first for commercial and then for political purposes. Many voices began to speak of a return to the USSR.

Combining Raymond Williams' concept of structure of feeling with theories of mediation and nostalgia, this book examines the changes that occurred in representations of the Soviet past in Russian culture from 1991 to 2012, covering a wide range of mediating arenas.

Ekaterina Kalinina (born 1983) earned MA degrees in Art History at St Petersburg University and in European Studies at Uppsala University. Her PhD project in Media and Communication Studies was carried out under the auspices of the Baltic and East European Graduate School (BEEGS) and the Research Area on Critical and Cultural Theory, Södertörn University. She has also been a visiting researcher at Copenhagen University and Aarhus University.